

FEBRUARY

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PUBLICATION

THE CURSE OF THE HOUSE

A Story of
Witchcraft's Labyrinth

By ROBERT
BLOCH

IN THIS ISSUE

THE SINGING SHADOWS

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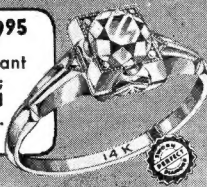


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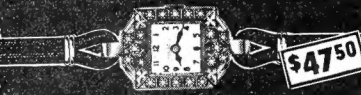


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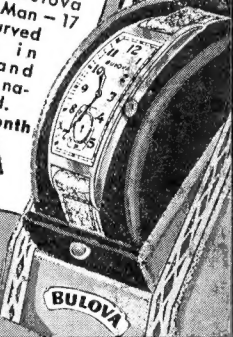
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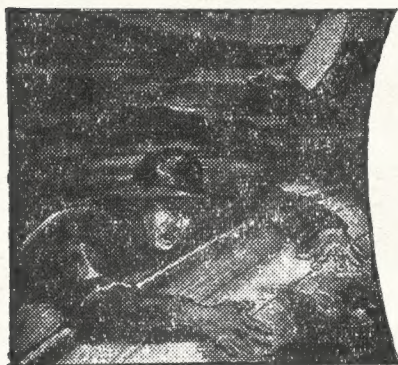
"GOODBYE WORLD! MY SHIP FADED INTO THE NIGHT!"

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TO CAPSIZED DORY AS SLOOP HOLDS COURSE



of 280 Bronxville Road, Bronxville, N. Y.
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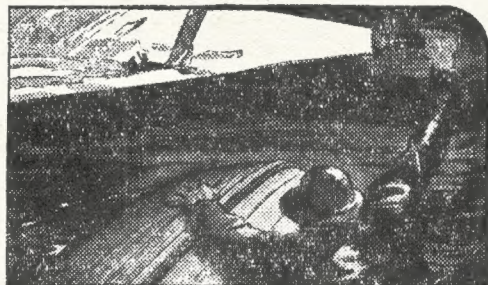
① "My 40-foot sloop was footing it up Long Island Sound like a scared cat before a stiff sou'-west breeze," writes Tom Meyer



② "...off Smithtown Bay, it really began to blow. My partner, Larry Starr, was asleep below, and I gave the tiller to a friend who had done no sailing before, so I could get the dinghy in on deck before it got away from us. Then, with the darn thing half-way on board a big comber pounded over the stern, swept my feet out from under me and overboard I went, weighted down with boots and oilskins. I still clung to the dinghy, but its line had parted and my ship faded quickly into the black night!

③ "The lad at the tiller didn't know how to bring the ship about, and although he would wake Larry, they'd be too far away to ever find me in that roaring darkness.

"I was growing numb with cold. I couldn't hang on much longer. I rolled against the gunwale of the dinghy for a fresh grip on the world that was slipping away from me. Something hard dug into my side... the flashlight in my pocket! Soaked, though it was, here was a chance!



④ "I pressed the switch. A finger of light stabbed through the storm. Time dragged on as I played the light about me. I cursed my shipmates. 'Why can't the fools see my light?' and then... the beam caught the white sail! I screamed for joy. An arm waved encouragement. Minutes later, thanks to those *fresh* DATED 'Eveready' batteries that kept working under the toughest conditions imaginable, I was warm and happy in my own bunk on my own ship, our Block Island cruise resumed.

(Signed)

Tom Meyer



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Strange STORIES

VOL. I, NO. 1

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By LUCIFER

Famous Authority on Witchcraft and Superstition

KING SAUL saw the ghost of Solomon raised up out of the ground by the Witch of Endor. A tree at Salem withered when a witch was hanged from its bough. A lover threw himself over a cliff shortly after his rival had consulted a sorcerer. The blood of a beautiful girl whose throat was torn by a giant wolf in the moonlight was found on her lover's mouth back in the castle.

Black Arts! Voodooism, devil-worship, witchcraft, sorcery, black magic of every kind—what uncanny secrets lie beyond the curtains of ancient beliefs and time-honored tales? Are all these things mere figments of fancy—the superstitious outpourings of primitive peoples?

A witch-doctor cures a man before the eyes of doctors who had failed. Magic words and the touch of a dirty hand . . . strange mutterings and weird incantations. What unknown power, what eerie manifestation is this that defies all reason?

Are we being deceived? Is all this just ordinary "hokum"—nonsense which can be debunked and plausibly explained?

Perhaps. Yes, perhaps ninety percent of it is hokum—the distorted legends of primitive phenomena, the superstitious beliefs of ignorant savages, the animistic nightmares of untutored tribes. But what about the other ten percent? What about the authenticated incidents which cannot be explained, incidents which have been the subject of controversial arguments for ages?

Lost Touchstones

The true scientist does not shrug away anything he does not understand. Perhaps there are touchstones that have been lost to us—touchstones that will give the clue to the origin of the black arts. For there must be a foundation to any building. The

spirit of research which has led to so many new fountains of knowledge may some day lead to an understanding of the things that are still beyond our ken. But until then, we must still wonder—and hope that we may yet fathom the enigmas which must lie at the core of the uncanny.

This department, then, intends to give reflective consideration to all forms of the black arts—or if you like, to "give the devil his due."

Witchcraft

Salem, Mass., is famous for its witches—

and it is to Salem that we turn first for an instance of one of those amazing factual occurrences which make us wonder. . . .

It is the year, 1670. In the dark of midnight, a frantic man skulks to the outskirts of a cabin. He is about to consult a witch. . . . He has been cheated by a knave—fifty-five horses have been stolen by trickery. They now are on a boat anchored in Salem Harbor about to sail for England. He wants them back—or vengeance on the knave.

In the dim light of the dirty cabin the witch looks at him.

She grins, her jagged teeth like ugly stalagmites reach down to her moving tongue, and she demands her price. It is paid. She goes to the window, looks out in the moonlight and sees the boat resting peacefully on calm waters. She turns and hobbles to the cauldron upon the hearth. She stirs the embers with her crooked stick, and tiny flames shoot up. Shadows that look like crawling reptiles appear on the wall.

She snickers—a sickly sound—then lifts her stick and begins to stir her boiling brew of hate. Fumes arise and the room is filled with a stench that even the man who has bargained with the devil can hardly endure. But he goes to the window and

(Continued on page 10)

OPEN SESAME

WITH this issue—Volume One, Number One, of **STRANGE STORIES**—we pledge to open to you, our readers, the doors of fantastic adventure, of startling realms beyond the curtains of eternity where weavers fashion bizarre tales imbued with magic and enchantment.

In this spirit we greet all lovers of the weird and the uncanny. Let us step upon the Flying Carpet that is **STRANGE STORIES** and glide away into the wondrous land of chimeras and star-dust.

Please invoke the sorcery of the written word when you have finished reading this opening issue, and tell us whether or not we are proving good genii.

—THE EDITORS.



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(Continued from page 6)

looks out at the boat, wishing in his heart that it would sink.

The Cauldron Boils

The cauldron boils—a bubbling sound like a throat rattle of death. The witch stirs on, mumbling her dirge of evil. The whole atmosphere is one of abomination. The man can feel something in the air that stimulates his desire for vengeance. He could kill with a smile.

A light appears on the ship. It is a lantern. All is well.

Suddenly the witch stops stirring. The hiss from the cauldron is that of a hundred snakes. The room is filled with vapor which seeps through the door and the cracks in the window sill.

The man turns to the witch. She goes to the door, opens it. The man follows her. Then slowly like a pendulum of hate, the witch starts swinging her cane right and left. The boat is plainly seen in the moonlight. The witch swings on. One minute, two minutes, perhaps five minutes—and then. . .

The man cannot believe his eyes. The boat in the harbor begins to rock, although the water is calm. More lanterns appear on the deck of the boat. Men are running around. Panic has struck them. Frantic men start swimming to shore. Splashes appear in the water beside the boat as it rocks like a cradle in the wind. But there is no wind!

Now the anchor is pulled. The boat drifts slowly back to shore. People are now lined on the bank—watching the strange boat that rocks in a calm.

Minutes pass—the boat drifts in. Then shouts of people are heard. Horses are running on the deck, whinnying as though in terror. Confused, bewildered, they leap in the water and swim to shore.

Soon the boat stops rocking. The whole town has turned out to see the mystery of the sea. The witch goes back to her hut. The man mingles with the crowd.

The next day the phenomenon is "explained" by practical men. They say that the horses broke loose from the stalls and began to run upon the decks, and this change of weight caused the small boat to rock.

Perhaps. But nobody explained one significant point. *What caused the horses to break loose?*

Coincidence? But the witch snickered in her hut—and the man grinned in his glee. For his price to the devil had brought results. He rounded up his horses after they had swum to shore!

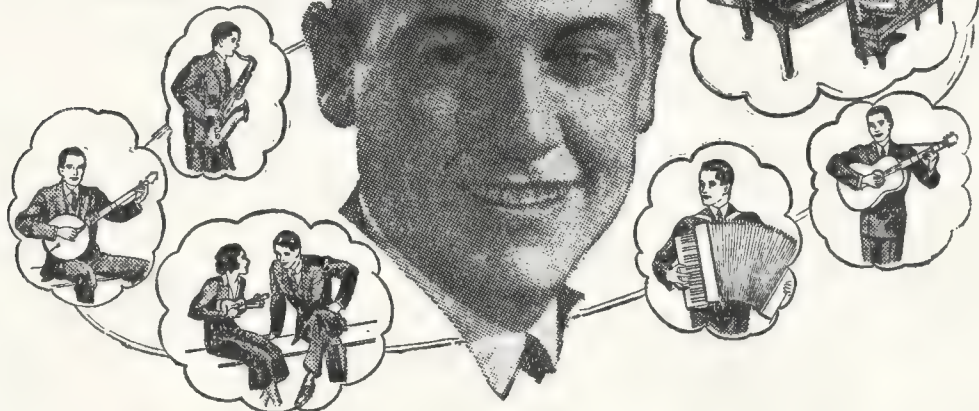
Modern Times

For those skeptics who scoff at tales of the past, we turn now to modern times. Names and dates are available—and the record is not marred or distorted by age.

It is the year 1938 in the city of Charleston, S. C. Mr. George Leberman of San

(Continued on page 12)

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See
WOODSTOCK
TYPEWRITERS

(Continued from page 10)
Sauci Street, who is employed in the market section, is on a business trip through North Carolina.

A few miles from Spruce Pines he stops at the home of a friend. During a conversation, the subject of witches comes up. The friend tells of a strange old woman who lives in the woods nearby. People often consult her on magic.

Leberman is interested. Things haven't been going well with him, and perhaps a magic tip may bring him good fortune. So he asks his friend how he can contact this strange old woman supposed to have mystic power.

"You must go alone, at night," answers the friend. "Take a live chicken with you. The woman does not take money. I don't know why, but that is her custom."

It is well after dark when Leberman secures his chicken from his friend's coop and drives to the lonely road leading to the hidden cabin. There is no moon, but Leberman has a flashlight. He parks his car and starts up the hill on foot.

Through the one window in the hut ahead of him he can see moving shadows, the reflections from a fire that must be burning in the hearth within. He reaches the door, but he does not knock. He doesn't have to. The door opens, but he sees no one behind it. Then in the dim light he catches sight of the form of a round-shouldered old woman standing in the far end of the room, leaning on a cane. Beside her is the hearth where a black cauldron hangs over the fire.

The witch looks at him, a slight trace of a grin upon her ugly face. She notices the chicken, hobbles up to him and in a cackling voice orders him to cut off the chicken's head, pointing to a block near the door and an axe beside it.

Mesmerized, Leberman obeys.
"Bring the head to me," she says.

An Unholy Broth

He picks up the bloody head and walks over to the shabby woman. She grabs the head from his hand, pats it lovingly, then leans over and drops it in the cauldron. The witch begins to stir the unpleasant-smelling contents—an unholy broth that even swine would not eat.

Leberman's heart is pounding, and a strange sensation creeps over him. Time seems to stand still . . . and then suddenly the witch stops stirring. The cauldron is boiling as vapors arise.

Abruptly he hears a roar of wind. Automatically he turns to the door as though expecting to see leaves or rubbish come swooping in the room caused by the gale. But the grass just outside the doorway does not move. Even a bush by the path is motionless.

He turns to the woman again. She stares at him with an ungodly eye, but she seems to be looking right through him. Then she speaks, her tone harsh and unwholesome: "Beware of the howl of the wind of death. It would kill you."

Instantly, the noise of the gale ceases, and all is silent save for the bubbling of a chant:

The witch continues, this time almost in the cauldron.

"When you hear the roar of Satan's breath—grab your cat and hide in the cellar."

Leberman starts. He has a cat—a pet of whom he's extremely fond. How does the old woman know? He always keeps his cat in the warehouse where he works.

He waits for the witch to say more. He looks up at her expectantly.

"That's all," the old woman mumbles. "You may go."

Leberman loses no time in reaching his car at the end of the lonely lane. The strange sensation he's had has made him uneasy.

Back at his friend's home he tells what happened and scoffs at the whole meaningless affair. It's been a good experience—and with that he dismisses it from his mind.

Several weeks pass. Comes the morning of September 29th. Leberman is sitting at his office desk in his warehouse in Charleston. Suddenly he glances out the window to the street. The sky is growing dark. He is about to go to the window and look out when he hears the sound of wind blowing furiously. Litter in the street is tossed about as though in the grip of a whirlwind.

Hell Breaks Loose

The roar continues—getting heavier and heavier. Then something flashes across his brain. It is the warning of the old woman. The sound of the gale is just like the roar he had heard in the witch's cabin. He looks around and there is his cat curled up on the bench across the office. He runs to the cat almost automatically. Grabbing the startled pet, he rushes down to the cellar.

Then all hell breaks loose. The wind is terrific. He hears screams in the street and the crash of timber. The whole warehouse section seems to be tumbling down.

It is soon over. Leberman and his cat are safe, although he has to chop his way out of the cellar to reach the street. He realizes then what has happened. Had he run to the street like the others, he would have been killed by the tornado which struck Charleston that morning, killing over fifty people in his section of the town.

Witchcraft? Black magic? Who can tell?

Write the Editors

This department welcomes questions, and interesting items on the Black Arts. Other angles of the Black Arts will be discussed in coming issues. We are planning a **BLACK ARTS CLUB** for readers—please write in and tell us if you would be interested in such an organization.

And—remember to write and tell the editors what you think of **STRANGE STORIES**. They welcome all comments, suggestions and criticisms—and a postcard will do as well as a letter.

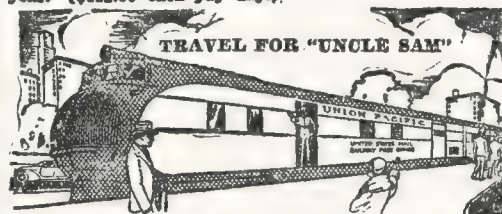
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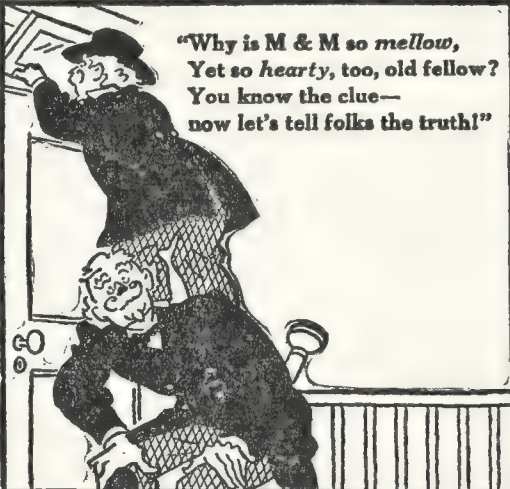
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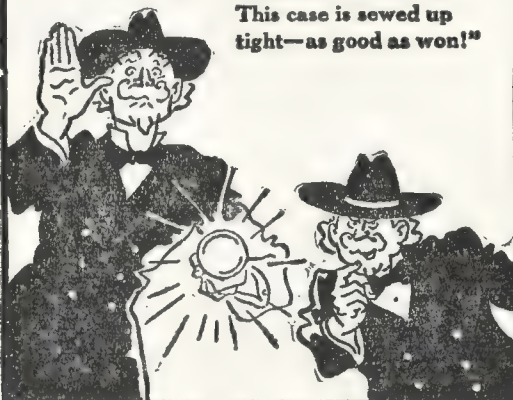
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The Singing Shadows

An Evil Wraith Dances, a Damned Soul Dreams, and Supernal Voices Whisper Warnings, as Averil Egerton, Jungle-Born Orchid Hunter, Struggles in a Web Whose Warp and Woof Are Mystery and Death!

By
**VINCENT
CORNIER**

*Author of "The Stone Ear,"
"The Mantle that Laughed," etc.*

CHAPTER I

The Dance of the Wanton

AVERIL EGERTON clenched and unclenched her hands as she sat by her bedroom window in Sir Gregory Congreve's manor house of Brindleigh Chase and stared out upon the restless,



The paradise orchid gripped them in its toils

night-shrouded sea. Her soul within her was strangely full of sorrow, and in her mind the imps of apprehension danced to the muted music of her fears—fears as impalpable as mist yet as certainly present as the dark rolling waters visible from her room.

Yet Averil Egerton should have been at home with fear—she had known it many times before in her young life—the fear and mystery

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Terror and Tragedy Stalk when the Passion

bound up with her remarkable work—work that would have been extraordinary even for a man.

Born twenty-three years before of medical missionary parents in the East Indian Islands of the head-

But that had been three years ago. Now Averil Egerton was an honored guest of the Congreves, called in to nurture that fabulously priced orchid into bloom.

She had arrived that afternoon, had talked with Sir Gregory, who had listened to her with fascinated interest, and who, incidentally, had paid her the most astounding and unexpected tribute of her career.

She was not thinking about that now, however. Dinner, at which there



hunters, bred up in loveliness among the most beautiful flowers in the world, she had become the supreme authority on those flowers—she trafficked with them between eerie forests and the London markets. She was an orchid hunter.

An orchid had brought her to Brindleigh Chase—an orchid she had delivered to Messrs. Barnaby and Duncannon, who had sold it in turn to Sir Gregory Congreve for the stupendous sum of two thousand pounds!

Fascinated, Averil watched

had been guests, was long over. She had grown uneasy at dinner, and had taken that uneasiness up with her to her room. There, instead of diminishing, it had grown, feeding upon

The Hue Se Tsi L'an Wafts Death-Laden,

Flower of Paradise Bursts into Bloom!

itself and upon the mixed impressions she had gained of Sir Gregory and his wife; of their matter-of-fact son, Lacy; of their other son, William, who was not matter-of-fact. No, Bill Congreve was strange.

But, strangest of all, impinging upon her sensitivity like the gossamer wings of a butterfly brushing an orchid petal, was her impression of another man—the man with whom Bill Congreve was reputed to be inseparable — the man who had been Sir

broke in long white-capped combers on this strip of English shore—wind and water seemed to grieve together. And—

What was that!

Averil Egerton's lips parted. Mysteriously, like an outward answer to her inward yet nameless fear, a sound was coming — a sound not made by the sea, nor yet by the tormented ash trees on the manor grounds—a queer sound, with ratlike squeaks in it—the kind of sound timbers, after wind-stress, make.

But this was a humanly-devised music. Elementary and disconnected though it was, it was music made by human fingers and human lips. Averil could have sworn it.

She spun up from the window



the unearthly dance

Gregory's neighbor for the last three years—the Dutchman from America—Mynheer Van Rankyn.

It was an unquiet night. The wind made steady moan. The North Sea

Eerie Music to Brindleigh Chase Manor!

seat and waited for its repetition. It came. Again and again it came—the threnody of a pipe of reeds. Someone was calling, weirdly and persistently, from the shore, in the primitive cadences of primitive people.

Then she heard something else, something that told her she was not the only one in Brindleigh Chase to hear. Her nameless fears gave way to excitement—a door had slowly opened somewhere. A gentle clump and the slight rattle of a handle told her that the “someone” had closed it after him. Then a crunch of cautious feet on gravel.

Averil glanced swiftly around her room. The fire had died to embers, not sufficient to limn her slender form in the window frame. The place was heavily curtained, and shadows were plentiful. She risked standing alongside the windowpane and curiously peeped into the moonlit garden.

A tall and shambling shape moved across a patch of grass and merged into the darkness of a beech-hedge. The direction it was taking was toward the narrow sands.

Averil acted swiftly. She had good reason to follow that figure—the unmistakable figure of Bill Congreve.

Outside and below her chamber was one of the twin bay windows of the dining room. A crenellated coping of basalt bound it, and strong ivy tangled up to its rim. She opened her window, stepped out onto the leaded roofing of the bay. A catlike scramble down the ivy matting brought her safely to the ground.

She did all this as naturally as other girls walk. Part of her success in her strange profession had depended on her ability to climb. If, in the jungle, the tallest tree had not daunted her, it would have been strange indeed if she had hesitated over a fifteen-foot drop. Besides, there was more than an orchid involved in this—there was a human being.

Averil was determined to find out what that thin fluting meant. She was equally determined to discover where the shambling half-drugged

figure of Bill Congreve was headed. Yes, he was drugged. Averil had reason to know that too.

Over the grounds and out upon the sand-dunes, Averil made her way. By this time Bill Congreve was out of sight, but his unsteady blunderings had left tracks in the wet sand that a child could have followed. Yet she was cautious.

When Averil next glimpsed his figure, the house was far behind and the sea was very near. The wailing of the reeds was still in the air, but louder now. Where, exactly, it proceeded from, she could not tell; the piper was invisible. But she surmised that he, or she, or it, was concealed among the hummocks crowned with sedges that guarded the sandy flats. She moved forward craftily and silently.

CONGREVE had stopped. Where he stood, a bit of gleaming white sand bit into the highest rampart of the dunes. The sea receded at this point more than elsewhere. Congreve had reached what looked like a natural amphitheatre.

He moved again. Averil saw him paw and scuffle about an altar-like block of basalt whose lower level was fringed with long ribbons of wet weed. Evidently he intended to climb up to the top of the block, but he was having difficulty. His movements were those of a drunken man—his futile grabs, his unsteady attempts to find a grip on the weeded base, his flopping unhandiness. He was intoxicated . . . but not with alcohol.

Averil's woodcraft served her easily; her sure and long-experienced hands did not falter. She drew herself so silently near that she was not more than ten feet from Bill Congreve when at last he succeeded in establishing himself on the big flat slab. She was nearer to the sea than he; the offshore night wind carried across him and the odor she caught was not that of alcohol. Once already that night her nostrils had sent that same message to her brain. Bill Congreve reeked with the dread drug, *Beu Hiang!*

He lay there in the clean night, a half-befuddled human clod. But Averil Egerton was sure of one thing—the devilish music of those little savage pipes was communicating to him some intelligence whose meaning was as yet concealed from her.

It seemed to Averil in that moment that there were only two people left alive in the world—herself and Sir Gregory's younger son—she, the orchid bringer, and he, the *Beu Hiang* eater. It seemed that her orchid-bringing and his *Beu Hiang* eating were tied together by silken cords of evil—an evil she could not yet fathom but which had begun to whisper to her at dinner and which had continued to whisper to her in the privacy of her bedroom overlooking the sea. They two, alone upon a wind-swept earth, listening to eerie music blown on primitive pipes. . . .

Alone? God in heaven, no! In the gloom of the shadowed pit Averil saw it, and simultaneous with her sharp intake of breath she could have sworn it was a bird, a great blue bird rising from the dark shoulders of the sand dunes, shrugging hugely into the upper air. But then, her held breath aching in her throat and breast, she saw that the blue wings were filmy veils—the slender body between them, gleaming in the moonlight, was a woman's!

The reedy pipes played on. The looped veils beneath the arms gently moved to their music. Now the satiny smooth blue-white body of the ghost woman was lost in them, now it reappeared. And then the veils were suddenly gone—two gray-blue quivers moved tremulously where before the veils had maddeningly concealed and even more maddeningly revealed. And the devil dancer, seeming just to touch ground with an earth-disdaining toe, entered the smoothly sanded amphitheatre and dissolved into the embrace of its shadows.

Averil was not conscious of the ache in her muscles, nor of the wild beating of her heart. Flashings of vari-colored lights told her burning

eyes that the wanton apparition was ablaze with precious stones. Now and then the moonfire in her flying hair made the tresses encircle her exquisite little face like a halo of black pearls. And all the while her slender limbs were serpentine with cunning invitation. . . .

Averil clenched at the stones and rough grass beneath her hot hands. The thing was devilish—devilish beyond all telling. She was a woman herself; men had called her beautiful—but this ivory phantom that made the harsh beach a silken floor for her tiny feet was more than beautiful; all man-maddening allurements were concentrated in her being.

Congreve's figure stirred. He lifted himself onto one elbow, pulled a leg under his body. He was readying himself to leap down from the rock.

The dancer advanced. Congreve crouched, prepared to leap. The uncanny dancer sped back.

Congreve, with a sob in his throat, jumped from the basalt tablet, went lumbering up the sands.

A musical laugh reached out from the dunes. Abruptly the piping ceased. The dancer was gone like a wraith.

Averil felt tears searing her eyes as she watched Sir Gregory's younger son, as she watched him blundering and falling over half-concealed stones, his arms yearningly outstretched, his soul and body uniting in a frenzied search after the vanished thing. . . .

"Miss Egerton"—a voice rasped into Averil's startled mind—"Miss Egerton—what in the world are you doing here?"

CHAPTER II

The Loom of the Unknown

SHE got to her feet and hastily dashed the sand from her clothing. Her hair was undone, gritty and bedraggled. Pushing it back into something like order, she turned to

face the man whose identity had already been revealed to her by his voice. Lacy Congreve, white-faced, haggard and miserable, loomed above her.

She was breathing quickly but she forced a calmness into her tones. "Watching," she said tersely. "Watching something I hope never to see again. And you?" she challenged. "What were you doing here?"

LACY CONGREVE raised his arms in a gesture of helplessness. "What do you think I was doing?" His attitude was rough, yet there was a blunt honesty in it which Averil knew was characteristic of him. "I saw that young fool of a brother of mine sidle off on this mad jaunt and I saw you scale down from your window after him. I might have let Bill go to the dickens, since I'm not his keeper—but I couldn't resist the temptation of following when I saw how dead-set you were on tracking him. I—I never saw anyone move more like a cat than you, Miss Egerton. I suppose it's your sort of job, though, after all." He smiled wanly.

"You followed me?"

"Not exactly. I surmised Bill's destination. He's got a sort of affection for mooning about this sand-pit at all hours of the day and night. Apparently you both made off in the same direction—I took a big detour and came on you from the down-shore."

"You saw the dancer?" she asked hesitantly.

She was half prepared to hear him reply in the negative, half prepared to believe that what she had seen had been only a wild figment of her imagination—that imagination nurtured in the jungle, attuned to mystery, sharpened by the dangers of her eternal search for flowers of beauty, for orchids, for the *Paradise Orchid*.

He shifted uncomfortably and she knew, with a sharp thrill in her heart, his answer before he uttered it.

"Yes, I saw her," he said in a low voice. "Who is she, what's her game, I can't say. A rotten, immoral wanton of a woman!"

It was evident that to his matter-of-fact mind there was nothing of the supernatural about the demonishly beautiful face they both had seen. Yet he added, still low-voiced: "But where the deuce could she have disappeared to?"

"If ever 'she' was here," Averil murmured.

"None of that, Miss Egerton. She was here right enough! My brother may have been bunged up to the chin with opium, or whatever the filthy stuff is that that Dutchman gives him, but I was clear-headed and I imagine you were the same. We saw her, didn't we?"

"Then you'd expect her to leave tracks," Averil said slowly, a little sadly too—her voice held overtones of a sad wisdom, a sorrowing fear, and Lacy Congreve felt strangely moved by it.

"The sand is soft and wet," she went on. "Shall we look for the tracks?"

"Oh, the tracks will be there all right. I'm not so much interested in the woman. I'd rather concentrate on locating Bill."

"If I told you now," Averil said, and her smile did something to the man—it was winsome yet frightened at the same time—"if I told you now that even though the dancing took place, no trace of that dancing exists or ever existed, would you believe me?"

"I'd hesitate to disbelieve anyone as charming as you," he said. He grinned, and it was surprising how that grin lit up his strong sober face. "But the creature was flesh and blood or I'll eat my hat," he added emphatically.

"I'm not glad that I can't agree with you," Averil murmured sadly. "I've seen too much, in India, in the jungles of Java and Borneo—"

She broke off, sensing his tenseness, his desire for action, even before he said: "Bill's the mystic of our family, Miss Egerton—not I.

Come on—let's prove or disprove those footprints."

Averil nodded. She stepped a quick pace or two to get into his stride. The effort shook her and made her cry out. Long crouching among the sodden grasses and on the sand had seized her muscles in a chill. She stumbled and moaned.

"I say!" Lacy Congreve cried. "You—you poor little soul—you're absolutely knocked to pieces by the business. Here—grab hold of my arm and keep hold."

Averil was glad of the offer—and was unaware of the emotions aroused in Lacy Congreve by the simple touch of her hand on his arm. The truth was that the broad-shouldered older son of Sir Gregory had from their first meeting stood somewhat in awe of the personality of the famous and self-possessed Miss Egerton, expert and collector of orchids. But now he had upon his arm the warm and fluttering touch of a frail, lovely girl whose name was Averil — no longer Miss Egerton, but Averil, the sweet name of a girl depending on his strength.

CLOSE to each other, they moved toward the place where the dancing had been. They came to it, and Lacy Congreve examined the moonlit sand. Then he turned to Averil, his candid eyes wide and unbelieving, his face awed.

"You—you were right," he whispered, and he did not know he was whispering. He shook his head, drew his hand across his eyes. "This sand when it's wet takes impressions like soft plaster and keeps them for hours. A small bird couldn't have hopped across here without leaving tracks. Yet there are no tracks here—just as you knew—just as you knew. . . ."

Averil nodded wearily. Yes, she had known, she had foretold. Had she not seen things similar to this before—this ghastly dancing with beauty and evil in it—in lost savage villages, by the wilderness waters of the Chinese East? Yes, similar—but not the same. Never anything as

beautiful, nor as evil, nor as supernally fear-inspiring.

"I'm tired," she murmured.

"You must be." The falling cadence of his tones caressed her. She did not know that Lacy Congreve had never spoken so tenderly to anyone before. "You've had a deuce of a time. Let's get out of here."

They walked back along the sea-shore. The metal breath of bells came from the quiet land, marking the first hour of a new day. Rats chiselled and shrilled among drifted wrack heaps, curlews uneasily wailed, and somewhere a honking squadron of gray-lag geese netted the lines of their flight into a speeding V. The eternal sea broke mournfully upon the shore.

The blend of sorrow and fear which Averil Egerton had felt in her room was still within her. What she had seen in the sandpit had simply confirmed it, strengthened it. She felt the loom of mystery, which even Lacy Congreve's strong arm could not dispel. Its fabric was the stuff of death—its pattern was an orchid—an orchid called Paradise—and for the presence of that orchid at Brindleigh Chase, she, Averil Egerton, was responsible. The memory of the dinner came back to her—and with it something Lacy Congreve had said on the dunes. She broached the subject to him abruptly.

"You said something about opium 'or some other filthy stuff'. You intimated that the supplier of that drug is Mynheer Van Rankyn. Is that true?"

"I was all worked up when I let that cat out of the bag, Miss Egerton. I hope you won't think anything more about it."

But Averil had learned enough.

If it was true, if that extraordinary country gentleman named Van Rankyn was supplying William Congreve with *Beu Hiang*, then Van Rankyn had killed William Congreve—was killing William Congreve as surely as day followed night! She remembered her introduction to Van Rankyn before dinner. She remembered how glad she had been that

the ceremony of introduction in England required nothing from a woman but a nod of her head. For she had not wanted to touch Mynheer Van Rankyn's hand.

Aye. Van Rankyn was the enemy within the gates. She wondered if she would find, in Lacy Congreve, an ally against that enemy.

They had reached the wall of the gardens. Lacy followed Averil's gaze to the ivy-covered window-bay. "No need to go back in the way you came out," he said softly. "You've gone through enough for one night. No one will be up yet—we'll slip in quietly together, and you'll go to your room to get some much needed sleep."

Silently they entered the house.

"About this rotten business on the sands," Lacy inquired softly. "Shall we forget it?"

"Could you forget it?" Averil asked. "But I shan't mention it if that's what you mean."

"I don't want the *mater* and the governor to be hurt," he said simply. "I'll help Bill in my own way. Don't you think that's best?"

SHE nodded, knowing that her nod was a lie. Bill Congreve was past help. Yet what good would it do to tell Lacy that? It would give him pain, and she did not want to give him pain. He had come to mean something to her, more than any man had ever meant before. No, he was too clean, too good, to be drawn into the depths of the mystic and the occult in which she, jungle-born, an orchid hunter, was so much more at home. She would have to act alone, until such time as she could no longer do without his honesty and strength. She waved him a good-by over the bannister.

When she was gone he stood for a long while at the foot of the stairs—until the deliciously penetrant suspicion of heliotrope which she had left on the close air was no longer present. Then he wandered off to get himself a stiff drink and to wonder just what attitude he would have to take with his brother when next

he met that queer and suffering young man.

In her room Averil undressed, creamed her face and brushed her hair. Her promise to Lacy had put her in a dilemma. For she had promised Lacy's father, Sir Gregory, something quite different in their talk the previous afternoon.

She had promised him that she would reveal all that she knew about the mystery behind the priceless orchid she had hunted and found, and which she had been called to Brindleigh Chase three years later to nurture into bloom.

What that promise now involved was telling Sir Gregory about his younger son, about Bill Congreve's tragic use of *Dieu Hiang*, about the supplier of that dooming drug, and about the Thing toward which young Congreve had yearned with outstretched arms in the wind-swept amphitheatre on the dunes.

For of one thing Averil Egerton was sure: behind the drug and the doom and the dancer was the flower she had filched from the forest—that still unblooming orchid called Paradise—thing of still hidden beauty—the *Catasetum Egertonii*!

Yes, Sir Gregory had named that rarest of flowers after her, its discoverer! It was the thought of that altogether unexpected and overwhelming tribute she had taken up to her room with her, after her talk with Sir Gregory, after the dinner at which she had met Lacy and Mynheer Van Rankyn.

And she had sat by her window, a prey to her nameless fears, with an indefinable sorrow in her heart, until, with the fire in her room dying down she had heard that eerie music, and had clambered down the tangle of vines, and had followed Bill Congreve to the sand pit on the dunes.

Now she lay in her bed with unclosed eyes, and went back in her mind to the previous afternoon. Thoughts, events, swirled into a misty pattern as she turned the clock of her mind back to yesterday and reviewed things seen, people met, words spoken. . . .

CHAPTER III

Catasetum Egertonii!

THE hollow hour previous to dinner had been filled by an extraordinary talk with Sir Gregory Congreve in the privacy of his study. Sir Gregory's opening words had first warmed and then amazed her.

"I have asked you here in your capacity of expert," he said, "but I should be happy if you would look upon yourself as our most welcome guest. I don't want you to spend all your waking hours mooning about the orchid house. I have sons. You are too young, and, if an old man may pay a compliment, too beautiful, to devote all your time to even as rare a flower as"—he paused and then came the totally unexpected tribute—"Catasetum Egertonii."

Averil blinked. The color flooded into her face. She felt her breath come faster and the tears came into her eyes. That mighty Catasetum orchid—that two-thousand-pound rarity of the Catasetum—that flower of the gods Sir Gregory had purchased from her employers, Messrs. Barnaby & Duncannon, of Strensall Street, East London—named after her!

"Sir—Sir Gregory," she stammered. "I hadn't any idea that you'd care to register the Catasetum in my name! Really, I—I cannot even begin to thank—"

"You discovered it, I only bought it," he interrupted. "And if *Catasetum Egertonii* ever produces a bloom worthy of its namesake, I shall be quite content."

"If it blooms at all, you will find it something far beyond the loveliness of anything you have ever seen," Averil said tremulously. "The natural color transparencies I took of it, when it was in its wild state, don't begin to describe its beauty."

"That's saying a great deal—" Sir Gregory picked up the two bril-

liantly-fired squares of glass—the Lumiere autochromes to which Averil had referred. He lifted one of the plates up to the light and carefully examined it. Instead of a photographic negative of monotones, the autochromes were positives ablaze with microscopical stipples of color. Their glow was an almost perfect reproduction of natural hues.

What they showed were the cathedral mists and firefly high-lights of the heart of a forest. Golden-skinned natives clustered about a gnarled and half-rotten teakwood stump on which the orchid was growing. Thus had Averil first beheld it—a huge green-blue writhing of vegetation bearing gourd-like tubers of a satin and ashen texture—and nine bewildering blooms of faery glory: vast and waxen trumpets of miraculous purity and tint.

"Very, very fine," Sir Gregory murmured.

Averil nodded, thinking back.

Within four hours of her photographing the orchid, it was packed in rattans—teakwood stump and all—and off on its way to the coast. After sea and land passages, it was delivered to Barnaby & Duncannon at their warehouse in Strensall Street.

Averil had gone with it. She knew that she had found a treasure destined to be world-famous and she didn't intend that her employers should have all to say in the matter of its disposal. It was she who set the price on it—all Barnaby & Duncannon saw was a tangle of wood and decaying vegetable matter. They laughed—until the autochromes were developed and their wonderful record made permanent.

Barnaby whistled; Sandy Duncannon gasped—and within a day of Sir Gregory's purchase of the rarity for two thousand pounds, they cursed. Cables from all over America started coming in. The market they had thought dead was aroused into violent life. And they had to refuse offers twice as great as Averil had demanded.

The most amazing orchid in the

world had been discovered—by a woman.

That was three years ago. During that time the teakwood stump, in Sir Gregory's orchid house, put on verdure twice. The first year, under artificial cultivation, it produced one sickly flower no larger than a sweet-pea blossom. The second year it burgeoned into a score of pseudo-bulbs and four stillborn buds. Now was the third time of its prime—and Averil Egerton had been commissioned to employ every art and craft of her knowledge to nurse the orchid into bloom. If she succeeded she would receive a small fortune and a large fame. If she failed, the lonely wonder of that far-off Borneo forest would have been spirited away in vain. *Catasetum Egertonii* could not survive a third season of futility.

SIR GREGORY CONGREVE tapped the Lumiere plate. "I have assumed, from the expressions on these savages' faces, that they were against your taking of the orchid."

Averil's eyes saddened. "Yes. My journey to the coast was something of a nightmare. I hardly ever slept and rarely had a pistol out of my hand. Yes, Sir Gregory, collection of that orchid was not a pleasant experience."

"But why, Miss Egerton? What did they have against it?"

"I rather gathered that by my act I had brought down upon my men the mystic hand of a Chinese *ki e' ange*, a secret society. It appeared that this orchid was the emblem of that society."

"Really!" Sir Gregory's voice suddenly sharpened. "Then, as a flower, it must be well known!"

Averil shook her head and her smile was mirthless. "I see what you mean, Sir Gregory, and I understand what is disturbing you: if the flower is well known, then it isn't rare, and if it isn't rare it isn't worth the two thousand pounds you paid for it."

Exactly," said Sir Gregory.

Averil shook her head.

"*Egertonii*"—as Averil's soft lips formed the unaccustomed word, she colored again—"is unique, definitely. It is the only *Catasetum* orchid ever to have come out of the Far East. It is the only Borneoan *Catasetum* known. Let me explain.

"The great societies of the Chinese, once upon a time, had secret encampments in the Borneo forests and hinterlands. Whole villages were given over to the practice of their terrible rites and to accommodate their fraternal lodges.

"But, about half a century ago the encampments and all the awful things they concealed were blasted out of existence. The Chinese were expelled—affair of gatling guns, Maxims and mountain artillery.

"Now what was the greatest treasure of those Chinese? Not their material possessions. No, the symbol of their order. So they took the greatest care in destroying all the orchids they possessed. For they couldn't hope to foster their growth in China, the climate being inimical. And above all they didn't want the 'foreign devils' to get hold of the blooms, so sacred to them. There was a great farewell ceremony and all their flower symbols were burned.

"*Egertonii* must have grown from some wind-borne spore. The Chinese secret-society mandarins certainly had no knowledge of its existence, else they would have gone through fire and water to destroy it. *Egertonii* is the last survivor, in all probability, of its race. Are you convinced, now, that you made a good bargain, Sir Gregory?"

Sir Gregory slowly nodded. "Yes," he murmured. "I am convinced. Convinced and troubled."

She looked at him quickly. His keen eyes took note of a certain quality in the look.

"You are troubled too, are you not, Miss Egerton?"

"Yes," she said softly. "I am troubled."

"I wonder," said Sir Gregory, "what especial virtue lay hidden in this *Catasetum*, making it such an object of worship? Have you any

idea why the secret brotherhood took the flower as their totem?"

Averil felt a slight tremor go up and down her spine. What was it? It was as though some force outside herself did not want her to speak. When she answered, the words seemed to come from her automatically—they were not the words that had been in her mind.

"The unusual old-wives' tales of the hinterlands, Sir Gregory. Not worth talking about."

But Sir Gregory was not fooled. "I'm afraid I can't accept that answer, Miss Egerton," he said. "On the basis of my own independent research into the matter, I must inquire if you ever heard, among this goblin talk of your men, any reference to the *Egertonii* being—being a flower that gave off a curious noise—not a perfume but a curious noise?"

Again something forced Averil to be evasive. "You mean that it can create soft whispers, the same as certain bulbophyllum orchids, to attract insects?"

"No, I don't mean that," said Sir Gregory, and he seemed to be irritated. "What I mean is: did any of your porters say anything about *Egertonii* being a *sound-flower*?"

"No. What they told me was that if I touched it I should be forever accursed—that I must not dare to violate its taboo."

"What was that taboo?"

"Some Tommy-rot about a deity called *Koe se I'an*—"

Sir Gregory interrupted. "Why aren't you being frank with me, Miss Egerton? Surely you must know as well as I that *Koe se I'an* isn't a deity but a collective term referring to those noisy members of the Chinese devil-heaven who were kicked out and sent to dwell on earth, for penance—the ghostly 'singers.' Don't you, Miss Egerton?"

"I do," said Averil, and it seemed to her that the power of Sir Gregory's personality had temporarily weakened the queer restraining force on her tongue. "The idea was prevalent among my men that *Koe se I'an* spirits dwelt in the *Egertonii* blooms

—does that satisfy you, Sir Gregory?"

"That's better," her strangely persistent questioner admitted.

"And," Averil went on, rapidly now, "the name of the secret society in question was *Hue Se Tsi L'an*—'the company of the singing shadows.' The members believed that their symbol flowers were shrines inhabited by those outcasts of Paradise. In fact, *Egertonii* already had a name—they called it 'Paradise.'"

"So violating the taboo—in other words touching the orchid blossoms—was the same as violating a shrine! Right?"

"Yes," said Averil, and again she felt the tremor. "I never saw it quite in that light before. No wonder my men were so fearful over what I was doing and what they were indirectly helping me to do. The dread of the old Chinese tongs is still strong among the Dyaks—"

"Yes," snapped Sir Gregory.

"Haven't the Dyaks a powerful deity whose name also means 'the singer of Paradise'? I seem to recollect they have."

"Not exactly the singer of Paradise," Averil said. "The English rendering of his name is confusing you. It's *Singalong Burong*, and it means the Voice of Heaven, the Supreme One."

"But the similarity, the connection, is there just the same; in both beliefs it's *sound* that's deified!"

"Yes," Averil echoed softly. "On the one hand we have our unholy tenants of the *Egertonii*, the singing shadow—and on the other we have a Mars-like personage who is worshipped as the Voice."

SIR GREGORY nodded. "It strikes me, Miss Egerton, that you are a very fortunate young lady."

"Why?"

"To be alive."

"Yes," said Averil in a low voice. "I am very fortunate to be still alive. But how could you know, or rather feel—as I feel—that I am in danger?"

"If you were more open with me,

"I'd be more open with you," Sir Gregory murmured.

"I've tried to be as candid as I could," Averil answered. How could she explain to this nobleman her mysterious sense of someone, something, putting a guard upon her tongue? "You're not being fair, Sir Gregory."

"More than fair!" A trace of suppressed passion crept into Sir Gregory's voice. "Who has lived with this eerie plant in my house for nearly three years, guarding it, studying it, nurturing it—and fearing it, yes fearing it, throughout that time?"

"Fearing it?" She could hardly recognize the echo as being of her own making. "You—you—feared it?"

"Yes, Miss Egerton. I've feared it as though it were the very devil sitting at my elbow. But you aren't surprised, are you? You must have known that it could engender fear. Even now—you wouldn't admit it but I can sense it—you're struggling with every fiber of your being to deny the hideous terror that is part and parcel of this mysterious growth you have brought into twentieth-century life!"

"I do admit it," said Averil in almost a whisper.

"But I don't suppose, for one moment, you regret your discovery of it. If I were in your place, I wouldn't either, but—"

Averil raised her hand. She was almost completely self-possessed again.

"Don't you think," she asked, "that things have come to a rather distressing pass if you, an elderly man, and I, a young and healthy woman, have got to be hoodooed by a miserable clump of flowers and greenery? Yes, you were right—I have withheld confidences. I know more than you think about that accursed orchid's evil history. And I promise to tell you more in good time. But you were also right in suggesting that I did a very unwise thing in bringing it into the ordinary materialisms of this twentieth century. There is one thing, therefore, I want to know."

"What is that?"

"Would you be prepared to let me repurchase the orchid—?"

"Never!" Sir Gregory's vehemence was astounding. "Miss Egerton—I tell you, never!"

"Then I presume you want me to go ahead and foster its flowering, as arranged?" Averil said, and with the words she felt her heart pounding with a strange joy and a strange fear, a sharp thrill that was neither pleasure nor pain, too intense to be either.

"If—if you dare do so."

"I dare, Sir Gregory. Come what may, I dare!"

CHAPTER IV

"... one with glass heels ..."

AVERIL lay in her bed with unclosed eyes. The clock of her mind was still turned back to the previous day, and now it moved out of the study with Sir Gregory, moved to the drawing room and to her first meeting with Sir Gregory's older son, Lacy. . . .

Cocktails. The laughter and chattering of guests, the clink and the tinkle of ice cubes in shakers, the comfortable maternal whiteness of Lady Congreve, and—Lacy.

Her first impression was that Lacy did not like her. His manner was blunt. He was aware of the orchid's eerie reputation but he did not share his father's fears about it.

"More than a flower, that orchid," he said. "At least, so they tell me—"

"But you don't believe it," she finished for him.

"To the untutored mind of a simple farmer a flower is a flower, in spite of what the lady expert says."

Averil laughed, at the same time sensing his antagonism and wondering at the reason for it.

"I presume," she said, "that by 'lady expert' you mean me, and by 'simple farmer' you mean yourself."

"Exactly," he said.

"And I presume the 'simple farmer' is offended at the 'lady expert's' suggestion that perhaps orchids have a near-intelligence, or intelligence approaching in dim ways the directing power of little insects."

"It's my sense of reality that's offended," he snapped.

She was silent an instant, then asked slowly: "Why don't you like me, Mr. Congreve?"

It caught him off his guard. He flushed and looked uncomfortable. Yet the honesty of his nature forced him to give an honest answer.

"There's been nothing but worry and trouble in this place since the damnable plant came here. Almost instinctively I've got into the habit of—of—"

"Of tracing it all back to me?"

"To be perfectly frank—yes," he said.

"I'm sorry," said Averil.

"Maybe you'll hit it off better with our neighbor, Mynheer Van Rankyn," Lacy said irritably, and Averil couldn't be sure if the irritation was directed at himself or at her. "At any rate, you'll find him more entertaining than I. He's a frightfully keen bloke on orchids. In fact, if you had turned down our request, he was prepared to nurture the *Egertonii* himself."

"Really?" Averil said, her professional pride aroused. "He must be a very advanced culturist if he thinks himself capable of that. Is he here now? I'd like to meet him."

"I daresay," said Lacy gloomily, and he sounded as though what he was thinking was: "Anything to get away from a dull fellow like me."

"Hasn't turned up yet. Out with my brother Bill somewhere. They're almost inseparables." He took her emptied cocktail glass. "A Dutchman, you know—can't say I like him. Potty about orchids. Matter of fact, when Barnaby and Duncannon first offered *Egertonii* for sale, Mynheer Van Rankyn was their first prospect. It seems that they sent all particulars to him, in New York, but they didn't reach him. Mynheer

was camping somewhere in the Adirondacks, and it was nearly a fortnight before the mail followed him. In the meantime, the governor had scooped the market."

"I—I remember now. He was the man, I believe, who cabled Barnaby and Duncannon offering incredible sums for the plant."

"Yes, and he was so galled at having missed the orchid, he came straight to England and began to pester us with fantastic offers."

"Which your father refused."

"Absolutely! He wouldn't hear of parting with *Egertonii*. And Mynheer, if you please, sat himself down on our doorstep to beg. Really, it's funny in a way—my governor and this Dutchman. For three blessed years now they've been at it—Van Rankyn never ceasing to importune, the old man never ceasing to give downright refusals. The dogged beggar bought a house, not half-a-mile away, and settled down to be as near the orchid as he could!"

"Fanatical," murmured Averil.

"Fanatical is right!" Lacy's tones left no doubt that he detested the Dutchman. "And"—his voice changed—"you'll have the pleasure of meeting him in a minute. He's just come in. My brother isn't with him after all." Lacy's voice was no longer vigorous but weary. "I'm afraid you won't see Bill tonight."

"Not at dinner?"

"No. He'll not turn up to feed." All Lacy's vitality seemed gone. "Anyhow, the other'll prove of interest. Come, let me do the honors. Van Rankyn is very interested in you, I might say.

THAT was when Averil had been glad that the trifling ceremony did not demand anything from her but a bow. She would not have touched Van Rankyn's slender hand for all the wealth of the Celebes. She had her reasons—reasons that would have shocked and confounded the Congreves into stupor. Reasons? . . . Why, she had a hundred! No woman who had been born and bred among those bright *pakhana* lands of the

East could make a mistake about her assessment of Mynheer Van Rankyn.

Averil knew his breed, from his delicate black head to the delicate and pointed feet. She knew the traffic of the sensuous brain behind the chilly agate eyes; the cruelty that was dormant in his lithe body. Yes . . . she had met the Van Rankyn stamp too often for mistake.

To her disgust she discovered that Lady Congreve had arranged for Van Rankyn to take her into dinner. Perforce she had to answer when he spoke to her.

"It is remarkable," he said, "to find a lady, and one so young, Miss Egerton, who is an authority upon those delicious extravagances of Nature we call the orchids."

"I don't altogether agree, Mynheer. After all, botany and horticulture are feminine sciences."

"Possibly," said Mynheer Van Rankyn, after a slight pause. He eyed her, smilingly. "I had not considered science in the light of genders before."

"No?"

"No," said Mynheer. "It is a pretty distinction." His enunciation of English was perfect. "When one recalls, however, the old cult of the orchid-watchers of Far Eastern fame, one is inclined to grant your point."

NOW Averil had no rational warrant for the constriction of dread about her heart. The Dutchman had merely made passing references to a well-known fact. The "orchid-watchers" were fabled virgins of a vestal quite similar to those of olden Rome. They had guarded living blooms instead of living fire. But those Eastern orchid-watchers had served their offices for the terrible princes of companies such as that of the singing shadows—mandarins of the orchid masonry known as the *Hue Se Tsi L'an*—or perhaps for the singing shadows themselves. . . . The very matters she had discussed with Sir Gregory.

But with Van Rankyn she professed ignorance.

"I don't exactly follow. What

orchid-watchers, mynheer—and of what cult?"

Van Rankyn smoothed his glossy, black hair. Averil noticed how fine it was, and long. And she also took note of the singularly lean and hairless hand. A big ruby set in old hammered gold spanned the olive-hued little finger of that hand.

"Surely, Miss Egerton, in this particular instance of your collection of *Catasetum Egertonii* someone must have informed you." There was tensioning of Van Rankyn's lips, neither smile nor sneer, yet partaking of both. "Had you no idea of the bloom's olden name? You know, once it was called Paradise—and there were priestesses of the orchid called Paradise."

"Really?"

"Yes, Miss Egerton, really."

Averil shrugged her shoulders and gazed abstractedly around. She caught Daphne Congreve's merry glance—and remembered that the eighteen-year-old daughter of the house was all agog to capture ten minutes or so of the time of the famous Averil Egerton.

"I'm afraid, Mynheer, you are talking the same nonsense as my porters did, when I came across *Egertonii*. And I was neither interested nor impressed then. You must forgive me."

Van Rankyn bowed. Averil was already moving away.

"Might I get you another cocktail?" he inquired urbanely.

Miss Egerton thanked him, but she did not want another cocktail. Elegantly enough Van Rankyn escorted her across to the rapturous Daphne's side. He made some casual remarks about the rising storm over the sea, and elegantly bowed himself away.

"Hateful man, that," said Daphne. "I always get the creeps when he comes near."

It seemed that Daphne was very much like her brother Lacy, honest and direct.

"I wouldn't care if his ways were only foreign," Daphne went on. "But they're so utterly other-worldish! Miss Egerton, if you can, just take

a tiny peep at him now as he's gliding across to Mother—there's an example."

Averil looked and Daphne whispered: "You see, I'm right in saying he glides—do you notice, his heels hardly touch the floor? Isn't that enough to give any normal person the shudders?"

Averil nodded, fascinated. Van Rankyn's movement was that of a wolf. The balls of his feet certainly met the parquet flooring, but the heels did not come down behind them. They touched—yes, they touched, but barely. . . .

Averil experienced a wave of quiet terror. Here, she knew—in a drawing room in an old English house by a healthy northern sea—was something that could turn a savage head-hunter of primitive haunts and steaming jungle tracks half-mad with loathing and terror.

Here—in the house of the Congreves, calling itself Piet Van Rankyn—was the gruesome embodiment of that diabolical near-ghost of the lands about the China Seas—"one with glass heels"—a weird physical manifestation of an unhuman entity!

The butler appeared at the drawing room door. Dinner was served—and Averil was taken in to it by this something that was not a man. . . .

It was some time after dinner that Averil met Bill Congreve. He didn't stay in the drawing room long but lounged off to the billiard room with Van Rankyn at the end of about ten minutes. Nevertheless it had been long enough for Averil to appraise him and to feel sorry for him.

He was a tall, unhealthy-looking youth. His talking was shrill and tumbling; utterly unlike Lacy's gentle, slow and whimsical speech. And his eyes stayed too long without movement, once they had fixed their gaze on anything.

Averil found herself at angry variance with the stealthy power of those eyes. They were luscious sloes, deep with the mists of hidden thought; wanton thought that sickened. All her womanhood arose against their searching and assess-

ment. She was not overpolite to Mr. William Congreve.

Nor was anyone else. Peculiar, but the mother of the man was the only person in that house who addressed him with ordinary charity. Sir Gregory was cool and curt; Lacy's voice droned wearily over him—despairingly, one might say; Daphne was flippant with him; and Van Rankyn's sighing and delicate "my dear Bill, just as you like, of course," was languid with tolerance and resignation.

THE warm-hearted Averil's sorrow grew. She took it up to her room with her, along with her confused thoughts about the orchid and her nameless dread. There was evil in Bill Congreve, yet her woman's heart yearned over him, yearned to help him. But in what? And against what?

It was really surprising to have to acknowledge that such a quality existed in one of the Congreve stock. They seemed the very last people on earth to have such evil among them. Sir Gregory, Lacy, Daphne and the good and ample Hannah, Sir Gregory's lady, were simple folk. Bill Congreve's dark eyes, subtle and complex, denied his goodly heritage. Averil had found the same evil among swarthy, fat and sun-fed people; indolents and lotus-eaters of tropical climes—she never dreamed she would come to find it in a fair-haired Englishman with some of his adolescent life still to be lived.

She had, however, no time to spend in summing up psychological problems. After all, Bill Congreve was a comparative stranger and, in a fortnight's time, he would pass out of her ken for good. Her job was to foster the orchid called *Egertonii*—or Paradise, she cared not which it was.

Averil shrugged and gently opened a window, preparatory to enjoying a midnight smoke. She did not know if the sedate Lady Congreve would altogether approve of feminine guests lighting cigarettes in her Queen Anne bedchambers, and she

was not going to risk disapproval. For all that, she was a smoker and intended to indulge—with caution.

But it was destined that Averil should not light her cigarette. The opening of the window gave her impulse a sudden stop.

A faint and balsamic air came into the room with the cold of the quiet night. It was closely akin to burning incense, and made one think of a scent as of rich oranges sending up chill and keen acridity from a bowl beneath one's nose. A scent of lush warmth and acid oiliness—a scent of a drug—of the drug *Beu Hiang*!

Someone addicted to that curse had *Beu Hiang* in Brindleigh Chase. Someone had been taking it recently. *Beu Hiang* was a crisp, gray, resinous powder that could be chewed into cloying juices, after the manner of dissolving Demerara sugar in the mouth. Someone who was a *Beu Hiang* eater had indulged in the passion not so very long ago!

Piet Van Rankyn? Hardly—else he had returned to the Chase after his leave-taking for his own home at ten o'clock. Again, Van Rankyn's eyes were too clear for those of a '*Hiang*-taker.

Bill Congreve! Of course!

Averil's heart throbbed and she felt immeasurably saddened. Yes, Bill Congreve's aspect betrayed the vice. His steady and clouded gaze was that of a '*Hiang*-eater. The treble tumult of the voice—the gawky stoop; the restlessness; the skinny body, the irritable and lackadaisical air—Bill Congreve, beyond a doubt!

But where did he get hold of the beastly stuff? And how had he been initiated into its doom?

There was nothing for an addict of '*Hiang* but ultimate agonizing delirium and death. The Malays and certain of the Papuan tribes had some powerful antidote to the poison—but they never disclosed it to Occidental knowledge. And *Beu Hiang* was essentially a product of camphor forests—how, in the name of goodness, was young Congreve able to ensure a steady supply?

If he stopped taking the drug, he was quite as liable to run amok as any "eater" of the East. To stop meant death—either by his own hand, speedily, or in a lunatic asylum, lingeringly. Assuming that Congreve was the addict, he must have had implicit trust in someone—someone who held the balance of life for him—someone who supplied him.

Bill Congreve, so she had heard, had never been out of England. Van Rankyn had—and, according to Lacy, he and Bill were inseparables. Van Rankyn knew the regions of the Eastern orchids. Naturally, therefore, Van Rankyn would have knowledge of *Beu Hiang* eaters and the camphor tracts out of which the essence came. And, knowing all this, he could easily procure supplies of it. So far as Averil was aware, *Beu Hiang* was not a contraband or a prohibited article. Yes, Van Rankyn could stand guilty, on all counts, of the initiation and the continued oppression of young Bill Congreve, in the ways of *Beu Hiang*. . . .

And then had come that eerie piping, that weird music that had drawn Bill Congreve from the house and had drawn her after him. The sand-pit on the dunes, the ghost dancer, her meeting with Lacy—all these episodes rolled up in her memory. And she had come back to the house clinging to Lacy's strong arm. His touch had been sweet. She had waved good-by to him over the bannister and had gone back to her room. She had lain in her bed with unclosed eyes, thinking back.

And now she lay with unclosed eyes, thinking—ahead. . . .

CHAPTER V

In the Thrall of Beu Hiang

VAN RANKYN—he was at the bottom of the whole devilish business. Van Rankyn, the "untouchable"—the "one with glass

heels"—no more a Dutchman than she was a Hottentot. Piet Van Rankyn, who was doubtless the genius behind that incredible dance on the sands—that dancing of the Flower Ghost—that dance of the wanton beauty—that dance of secret ritual, performed by the "projection" of a *Hue* priestess; by the old and evil soul of something gloriously beautiful in living flesh, an orchid-watcher, a vestal, the thing Van Rankyn had himself spoke of!

Van Rankyn—he did not live! Or, if he did, then the orchid which she, Averil had found, did not.

It was a buffeting and torturing mass of bewilderment. Averil wished in that moment that her fateful steps had never taken her through those dim forest ways to the Paradise Orchid, to *Egertonii*. The stuff of death. She did not want it near her. She was young, a woman without a mate, with the widening of life before her in the glow of a love that had been born in an hour.

HER thinking stopped with the awful scream that cut the silent hours in twain.

It was a man's voice that had made the dreadful cry.

Averil caught up her dressing-gown and flew across to the wardrobe, where she seized her automatic pistol. She placed the squat little weapon into the deep cuff of her left sleeve and sped to the head of the stairs. Even with her delay, she was the first out of all the panic-stricken house to be astir.

Down the stairs, across the hall and to the switches, Averil went. She flooded the place with light. Then, from room to room, she scoured—

It was Lacy Congreve who had screamed. He lay by a long, oaken side-table in the dining room. A glass was shattered in his right hand, and spirits mingled with the blood of his lacerated fingers. His hair was torn almost as though a wild beast had clawed him; his right ear was purple and swollen; his collar and tie were crumpled ruins, and

his dully-reddened face lay half-hidden beneath the table.

Averil set her teeth and gently opened the stiff fingers. Then she lifted the awry head. A bruise as big as her hand cut across Lacy's right jaw and extended into the curve of his throat. As though he had been struck upwards with a hockey-stick—a boomerang—

Averil groaned and frenziedly listened for any sound of breathing, felt for the movement of his pulse. Very rarely, she knew, did anyone survive treatment such as had been meted out to Lacy Congreve—

Again the uncanny relevance to all this orchid mystery—Lacy had been felled by a blow from an up-thrust arm that was intended to break his neck. A ju-jutsu grip; a Chinese garroter's trick; a swinging curve, sufficient to cause unconsciousness, then a tearing twist designed to separate the axis from the atlas bones of the vertebrae.

The same principle as that applied in judicial hanging had been exercised here—Lacy would be fortunate, indeed, if one spark of life remained.

Sir Gregory and Daphne and a crowd of scared servants were on the scene before she satisfied herself of his survival.

"Sir Gregory"—her hands hurt on his arms—"for Heaven's sake, pack them all off—every one, even Daphne! This is a man's job," she panted. "Someone phone for the doctor, and, Sir Gregory, help me—artificial respiration."

Sir Gregory Congreve had an excellent daughter in Daphne. Before he could reply that little lady was hustling, without regard for grace, all the household staff. Her face was ashen and her eyes like coals—yet she did as Averil asked.

Sir Gregory was slower in wit for once. Not until he saw that Averil did not intend to answer his alarmed questions did he grasp the urgency of the position. Then he settled down to working with her on reviving the stricken Lacy. He regularly pumped with the limp arms while

Averil supported the head and held the mouth open.

It seemed an age before great, shuddering breaths began to sound. Then Lacy twitched and groaned and chokingly coughed—his eyelids began to tremble and open, and the blackness went from under his skin.

"Thank God," Averil said, "he's—he's going to pull through!"

"What happened?" Sir Gregory's whisper was harsh. "How were you so quickly on the scene? What occurred?"

AVERIL darted him a searching look.

"What happened to him I don't know," she coldly replied. "All I can tell you is that I have seen men dead as a result of precisely the same death-dealing trick as this. They were flimsy natives; your son owes his life to his solid physique."

"You—you misunderstand me—"

"Sir Gregory, I don't understand nor misunderstand. I was in my room, not asleep, heard the cry and rushed downstairs. Here I found your son, and good fortune had it that I knew how to deal with the situation."

"... *Bill* ... *Bill*, don't ... be a rotter. ..."

Averil and the judge exchanged wild glances. Lacy's hoarse voice, gasping out the words, were frightening.

"William?" The old man's face paled and he trembled. "My God, can this be another of his idiotic—"

"*Bill!*" Lacy shuddered and his blank eyes grew wide with terror and loathing. "Don't—*don't!* Leave her alone—she's a fiend—no woman—not alive—"

Sir Gregory's haggard gaze flashed to Averil's face. At the last words Averil had cowered away from the semi-conscious man and had drawn her hands up to her mouth. Sir Gregory could not miss the awful expression with which she looked on Lacy.

"You know," Sir Gregory muttered, "Miss Egerton, you know what he means! *What?*"

Averil seemed not to hear. Her attitude was frozen. But then she suddenly shot out a hand and grasped at Sir Gregory's shoulders.

"The—the orchid," she gasped. "We must let the others attend to—to Lacy. He'll be all right until the doctor comes. Daphne seems very sensible—we must entrust her with his care."

"My dear Miss Egerton, I'm afraid you're rather unstrung. Where my son's welfare is concerned, the *Egertonii* simply doesn't matter."

"I know—I know—I know!" Averil looked at him wildly. "It'll not be the orchid that'll suffer so much as the man who has gone to tamper with it!"

"Miss Egerton, are you quite yourself? Who on earth wants to tamper with *Egertonii*?"

"*Bill*, don't have any truck with her, I say! She's not human . . . *Egerton* woman proved that on sands . . . *Averil—Averil*. Here, *Bill*, I'll—I'll damn' well see you don't—*Ah*, would you?—*Would you? Bill!*"

Lacy Congreve's mumblings ended in a noise like the echo of his first scream.

"Do you hear, Sir Gregory!" Averil cried.

"I hear," Sir Gregory snapped grimly. "Will you also inform me what my son's delirium refers to in the matter of your proving something wasn't human, on the sands, tonight?"

The time had come to break her pledge to Lacy. Swiftly she outlined to the horrified old man all that had transpired since first she had caught the orange-and-incense whiff of *Beu Hiang*. She told of her leaving the house via the ivy—of the phantom dancing—of her meeting with Lacy—everything.

"Every bit of the jig-saw pattern fits," she concluded breathlessly. "Van Rankyn, the drugging, the mad dancing—all belong! That ghastly flower is at the bottom of everything. It's a curse, a danger—Instead of asking me to nurture it into bloom, you—you ought to take yourself out of here, now, and destroy

it, root and all. It's beyond all—"

"This creature"—the judge sternly cut across Averil's outpour of excited words—"this woman—this figment—am I to infer that it is a dominating influence over my son, William? Are you actually trying to convince me that he is obsessed, possessed, controlled, by some vampire that hasn't physical existence?"

"That I can't tell you. All I'm certain of is the fact that the evil face emanates from the orchid, through its servant, Van Rankyn—"

"Please, Miss Egerton—"

"Please, Sir Gregory, don't interrupt me like this! I know my job as you know yours. I have lived far too long among the taboo-controlled races of mankind not to have a deep respect for matters you would carelessly dismiss with a shrug of your shoulders as being crass, supernatural bunkum."

She was coolly defiant.

"I tell you once more, Van Rankyn is *not* a Dutchman—Van Rankyn—Van Rankyn is *not* a man—and Van Rankyn is the absolute serf, in flesh, of the orchid which was called Paradise!"

"The Hué priestess, the devil-dancer, is beyond me—how that was conceived may never be explained. But it's apparent, from what your son said, that he caught sight of William and this phantom while he was standing by this table pouring himself a drink. Probably directed by this—this demon—his own brother made this attack on Lacy."

The judge had gone to a pallid wreck. All his vitality evaporated, as pale sunlight from a slowly-curtained room. Haggardly he gazed at Averil.

In a dead voice he said: "I don't know whether to condemn you as a neurotic fool or myself for paying attention to you. I got you here to attend to that orchid. It appears you are also able to look after affairs outside my province. You can go ahead, do as you please, have whatever freedom you like—only don't trespass on my mind any longer with your devil lore!"

"I shan't," said Averil. "I'll leave it to do its own trespassing."

Sir Gregory Congreve's reply was blocked by the arrival of the doctor. The nobleman felt that he was beginning to detest this Averil Egerton—

Lacy Congreve was borne up to his room and put to bed.

"Can we go into the orchid-house, Sir Gregory?" Averil asked.

"Now?"

"If you please."

"I should have thought—"

"Sir Gregory, you have another son."

The statement whiplashed the old man's face with sullen color.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Egerton," he murmured sadly.

Impulsively Averil stretched out her hands and grasped the cold fingers. "Let us go together," she said.

CHAPTER VI

Death Out of Paradise

THE orchid called Paradise was so beautiful that it stilled both heart and brain in wonder. It had bloomed in the storm of the night and now it stood, fierce with miracles of waxen jewels, slowly pulsing in its new-born glories of life.

It moved; no air shifted in that hot and humid atmosphere of the orchid's house, yet the blossoms moved—they moved with a proud and languid rhythm, as the lazy nodding of plumes on the heads of war-horses to far-away brass music coming through a summer's day.

All about it was the withered ruin of ordinary species; it was the only plant in flower—a flowering that frightened as well as fascinated. Its soft trumpet-throats of palest primrose velvet were flashed and raddled with metallic pollen radiance which varied from the phosphorescent sheen of coldest blue to that rich gamut of dim purples and vitric greens to be found on a turkey's tail

feather—a rainbow quenched with an olive glass.

Two golden tongues licked out over a thick *labellum*, like pea-green melon flesh speckled with starry cloves. It was an orchid without scent, yet cold columns of queerly intoxicating essence seemed to have risen about it to guard its shrine.

"I am not wanted," said Averil Egerton in an awed voice. "It—it has bloomed of itself."

In the warm silence Sir Gregory's voice came mournfully in response:

"It is a *Catasetum*. Have you ever known one of that genus to come to perfection without human attention—when in artificial cultivation?"

"I have not," said Averil, involuntarily sinking her voice to a whisper. "Not even the tiniest and commonest of the tribe."

The judge's fingers trembled as he pointed to a certain impression that was clear upon the soft soil which surrounded the teakwood stump on which the orchid grew.

"It has had aid, I think," he said harshly. "Look there!"

AVERIL emitted a queer little cry. The footprint in the soil was startlingly plain.

It was small and lightly driven—it was the print of a little bare foot—a woman's foot.

"Its watcher came to its aid," Averil whispered.

"I—I don't follow, Miss Egerton."

"I told you about Van Rankyn's references to the orchid virgins of the great Chinese *hués*."

Sir Gregory nodded. "So you think this orchid has not been neglected—"

Averil laughed a bitter spangle of sound.

"My theory is that my firm, in advertising the discovery of this plant to the connoisseurs they knew could afford to buy it, unfortunately also advertised it to some relic of 'the company of the singing shadows'—to some surviving lodge of the Chinese *Hué Se Tsi L'An*, as much as telling them their emblem-orchid still existed."

"I've been thinking very much the

same thing myself! Is that how you set this fellow, Van Rankyn, into the sorry scheme?"

"Precisely! He comes from America and pesters you with fantastic offers—"

"How do you know that?"

"Lacy told me," Averil said. "He not only offers to buy the bloom, but also offers to bring it over its crucial period of blossoming under artificial conditions. Further than that, he sits down on your very doorstep; becomes a family friend, a fellow-orchid-enthusiast, all with one set intent."

"And that?"

"Either the capture of the orchid for the *ki c'ang*, the tong that sent him here—or its destruction."

"There's a flaw in your argument," Sir Gregory muttered. "Miss Egerton, don't you see that he's had opportunity after opportunity to steal the plant—we've trusted him so—and again he's had similar opportunities to destroy it. Instead he has apparently engineered its coming to perfection."

"So it would seem," murmured Averil.

"But—but, Miss Egerton, in one breath you would have me believe a fantastic vestal of this 'sacred' plant has consummated its flowering, and in the other you don't disagree with my theory that Van Rankyn himself has accomplished the task! Really, what *am* I to think?"

"That he failed in his attempts to destroy the plant and he failed in his attempts to steal it."

"Have you any proof that he attempted either?"

"Only your son, William," was Averil's cryptic answer.

"My—my son? What, what on earth has he to do with—"

A soft and shuffling noise grew in the gloom of the big orchid-house. The judge whipped around to determine its cause. As for Averil, she very deftly removed the little automatic pistol from her cuff and pouched it in the security of her icily-cold right hand.

"What—what was that?"

"Sounds like a drunken man, walking carefully," Averil said steadily.

It was true. The noise of the hidden progress was like that of someone who had not the fullest control of his limbs, yet was trying hard, exaggeratedly hard, to move with caution.

"Who is there?"

Sir Gregory's voice echoed through the span of the glass roof. The shuffling stopped.

"Come along there—who's that?"

A tiny hiss ran across the air and something "picked" at the quilted mass of Sir Gregory's dressing-gown. He staggered back, astounded and badly scared.

Then a voice came across the place—Van Rankyn's cool and delicately-precise speech:

"I would not touch the little thorn that has stuck in your gown if I were you, Sir Gregory. It might prick your finger. Let the ubiquitous Miss Egerton look at it and she'll doubtless be able to tell you just what would happen after you pricked that finger."

Averil reeled. She had seen the thorn a second after its impact. She did not need the mocking cruelty of Van Rankyn's voice to confirm her knowledge of it.

"Poisoned! Sir Gregory, for God's sake, take care. You'd—you'd die in an hour!"

"Thank you, Miss Clever Eger-

ton!" Again Van Rankyn sneered from his hidden place. "You doubtless recognize it as a *Pakhatani sum-pit* point." Since Averil did not reply: "A little dart, my dear Sir Gregory, blown at you through a tube by my violent and dishonorable self, as a warning. I could as easily have implanted it in your face, you know."

"You—you devil—"

"Please! I'm in no mood, Sir Gregory, for futilities. Think what you like, but don't talk too much. Otherwise—"

"What do you want?"

"That's much better! I want you, and our so-clever Miss Egerton, to stand to one side, away from that orchid. It is to be collected—a second time."

Mechanically, Averil and the old man stepped away, leaving a space.

"Now then—" Van Rankyn's tones were honeyed and yet deadly with some quality of exultation. "Now then—we'll achieve what we have been commanded to achieve."

The heavy shuffling came again.

Into the body of the house, from behind a reredos of exotic plants like palms, William Congreve stepped.

His hands hung limply by his sides, his eyes were dead. His face was absolutely devoid of sensible expression and his jaw lolled to show

[Turn Page]



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his teeth and tongue. Like a sleep-walker, he advanced toward the orchid called Paradise.

"It will be quite useless, Sir Gregory, attempting to direct your son from the errand I have set him," Van Rankyn carefully called out. "He is going to take your plant away from you—and any attempt to prevent him might only result in his dealing out to your venerable self the same treatment he dealt out to his brother, Lacy, a little while ago.

"That stands as a warning for you, too, Miss Oh-so-very-clever Egerton!" A gurgling laugh edged the thin words. "You have, in this amiable young man, a perfect Frankenstein monster. Don't tempt his dull majesty, else your undeniable good looks will suffer sadly. William Congreve is my creature for the time being—*Me*—I think, Miss Egerton, you know what *that* means!"

Sharp as a lance, Averil rasped:

"I do! *Cei pak wie Tun'li!*"

An ominous silence and then a gasping breath.

"I—I don't know what holds me back, Miss Egerton." Van Rankyn's talk was now hideous with hatred. "The deadliest insult you could level—and yet, I let you live!"

Very lightly, Averil laughed.

"Your purpose, *Knife-hair*, isn't achieved. *That* holds you!"

Again a guttural sound of hatred. Then a swift succession of whispers.

Steadily onward tramped the figure of William Congreve.

His father, trembling, watched him near the glowing beauty of the orchid called Paradise.

Woodenly, William Congreve approached the orchid. His hands jerkily stretched out toward it until he fumblingly encountered a glossy pseudo-bulb. He moved from this through a rustling and an evil riot of greenery to seize on the moving throat of one of the huge blooms.

A movement had been made behind the reredos. Van Rankyn, all eagerness, had betrayed his hiding-place. Averil gradually twisted her armed right hand in such a way as to point dead at the movement—

A corner of Van Rankyn's shoulder showed, black against the spears of the leaves. There was a dull glint as the heavy ruby ring on his little finger caught at light as it lifted—gripped about the blow pipe.

AVERIL EGERTON fired—twice from the height of her waist and twice from eye-level.

Somewhere high above Van Rankyn's place a pane of glass went into shivering ruin as a bullet was deflected upwards, and, while the sound of this still lived, a sickeningly shrill cry came.

Van Rankyn crashed through the palms, stopped, clawed at a blood-stained hand, and spun around in agony.

"My God!" Sir Gregory's voice thundered. "What have you done, woman—what have you done?"

All his spirit was in violent revolt. All his loyal austerity was run into a flux of hottest fury. Before his eyes—the eyes of Mr. Justice Congreve, one of His Majesty's learned judges in the law—a man had been shot by a woman!

"Mad! You're mad! What—"

"Save your breath." This was the hard talking of Averil Egerton, who had been born in jungle territory and who held its simple code in greater awe than any formula of man. "Look to your son. This—this other affair—is mine. It was kill or be killed. One of us would have gone out of here feet foremost, if I hadn't shot."

A hiss came from Van Rankyn: "You!"

"I guessed as much, *Knife-hair!*" Again she employed that curious term. "Come—you're not so badly hurt as all that. Lucky for your hand my gun is only a point-three-five—You'll get over it."

Van Rankyn did not move, save to rock and tremble.

"Come on!" Averil raised the automatic. "I'm in no mood for defiance—*Come!*"

The "Dutchman" moved forward.

The judge gasped; Averil crinkled her eyes up to narrow slits.

Incongruous below impeccable trouser legs, "Van Rankyn's" feet showed. They were bare. Their toenails were lacquered with brilliant orange color. The dusky skin was marvelously ornamented by tattooed tracteries. . . .

And the feet were tiny—as tiny as the feet of a child. The little heels did not touch the ground, and a broad band of gold and diamonds corruscated about one ankle.

They were the beautiful feet of a woman—a savage woman.

"I'm glad you can show surprise, Sir Gregory," Averil calmly said. "It proves a lot—doesn't it?"

"A—a woman! Van Rankyn a—"

"A woman of the *Kina-Iedlin* people, Sir Gregory. 'A woman-with-knives-in-the-hair'—about as deadly a subject for discussion as—as a cobra."

"A woman!" Sir Gregory was dumbfounded.

They had forgotten William Congreve.

When the shots were fired, his touch had been laid on one of the orchid blooms. Naturally, he started away—for all his hypnotized or drugged state, he still could feel the shock of that swift drama. But, in his turning away, he changed from an automaton into a man of individual existence.

Until that moment he had been nothing but a marionette for "Van Rankyn's" string-pulling. No, it appeared, not only was he released from the thralldom, but also deadly bent on avenging it!

While Averil had talked, he had blinked his eyes and listened. Into his dim brain the knowledge seeped that his father and this Miss Egerton were allied against his erstwhile master. Granted this, as well as his revolt, it dawned on him that he, as the strongest of the trio, should take the initiative in whatever struggle was going forward.

He menaced with his arms and gradually drew in on "Van Rankyn." His power of thought did not understand the import of his father's horrified "a woman"—he thought his father referred to Averil Egerton.

So, not knowing the truth, he dealt with "Van Rankyn" on terms not permitted to manhood, and launched himself at that stricken figure.

"Van, you hound!" he roared. "I'll settle with you for good! Try your rotten tricks on me, would you? You knew that thing'd kill me if I touched it—you said so, you murderous dog."

He clawed at "Van Rankyn's" neck.

THE woman stiffened and moved like a lithe beast. Bill Congreve yelled and turned a semi-somersault.

"That," said Averil, "is where our unfortunate William learned the ju-jutsu trick which nearly killed his brother." Strangely she had not interfered. "I think," she raised her voice, "that you'd better not try any more battery and assault, Mr. Congreve! Our esteemed 'Piet Van Rankyn' is a woman! But a woman only too well able to take care of herself! If you don't want a broken back—keep off her!"

"Van Rankyn" dabbed at the tiny hole that bled in "his" right hand. As Averil had remarked, her automatic fired only very tiny bullets. The shock was more than the wounding, and the sufferer was rapidly recovering from that.

"Well," came the snarling voice, "what remains, Miss-oh-so-clever Egerton? The police?"

"That, *Knife-hair*, is Sir Gregory's concern." She still leveled the automatic. "For my part, I think you must save me any further trouble about this orchid. It seems you were able to break its bud-sheaths in just that expert way which its successful blossoming demanded—"

Her talking grew deadly—"Now, *Knife-hair*, you'll come and do what you intended your 'creature,' William Congreve, to do."

The *Kina-Iedlin* woman went gray. "Come," Averil said softly, "fertilize its blooms, so that Sir Gregory will be assured of its perennial flowering."

"Van Rankyn" cowered back.

"Come along," Averil said earnestly, "I'm not playing. I'm in deadly earnest—come and do what I say."

"It—it means," the *Kina-Iedlin* woman groaned rather than spoke her reply, "my death."

"Really?" Averil laughed. "And I suppose it wouldn't have meant my death if I had to do it—and I suppose you wouldn't have murdered William Congreve, by ordering him to do it?"

"It means death—for anyone."

CHAPTER VII

Death and Transfiguration

AVERIL lowered her pistol. "You hear, Sir Gregory?"

The judge nodded. "I hear," he said.

"Your son would have died to secure the life of this devilish plant. That, in the first count, is attempted murder—in the last analysis, murder. Can you find the slightest sympathy for such a ghoulish creature?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because," Averil Egerton icily replied, "I want you, a judge, to judge me—now."

"Van Rankyn" was standing facing the largest of the blooms. Averil stood at its side. As he had been speaking, she had glanced from the trumpet to "Van Rankyn's" face.

Then, at her ejaculation—"now"—she shot out her right hand and smacked the fleshy *labellum* of the orchid with the automatic pistol.

A rain of gold came across the judge's vision. The badly-shaken William Congreve, from a distance, saw more clearly.

He saw two of the many mushroom-like darts fly from the throat of the great flower and strike "Van Rankyn" on the face. One hit the left cheek, the other struck "his" brow—the remainder spent themselves in flight and fell harmlessly to the floor.

Save for a horrid little cry, "Van Rankyn" took the shock of the darts without any emotion. The delicate face went grayer, the eyes closed,

and the slim body trembled. The heels touched the floor.

"You—you have killed me, Egerton," was what the voice said.

"As you would have killed the son of the man, Sir Gregory Congreve, who, innocently enough, bought your devil orchid. As you have killed him, anyway—with *Beu Hiang*."

Sir Gregory tried to speak: he was a shuddering mass of nervous flesh. He could not speak.

"When those darts turn down—" Averil spoke, and Sir Gregory's old eyes looked at the things, he saw that long golden pointers stuck out from the discs which had adhered to "Van Rankyn's" flesh, saw that they were bending downwards to that flesh—"you will die, *Knife-hair*. You daren't touch them—because you still hope—still hope that I will repent and get them away from you—you dare not, for to touch them with your hands means death as surely."

"You will repent," the voice moaned. "You dare not let me die, like this."

"Do you deserve more?"

There was no answer.

"But, whether you die, or whether you live is no longer my affair. I asked for judgment—I demand it now."

She turned on the old man. "Sir Gregory, it's in your hands—this creature, one cannot call her 'woman'—has supplied *Beu Hiang* to your son. *He* must surely die. In the space of two minutes, those poisoned darts from the orchid called Paradise will excoriate *her* skin—and *she* will die."

All the while, the temper of "Van Rankyn" was degenerating to sheerest terror. And all the while the judge was reading something in Averil's attitude that gave him a curious glow of hope.

"The Papuans and the people of the Islands know the secret of the antidote to *Beu Hiang*—" the judge saw now what Averil was driving at—

"On you lies the decision."

"To let the darts perform their task?"

"Yes! Yes—if this woman does

not pledge herself to reveal the antidote!"

"The—the root of *Bulbophyllum Clanseta* is the antidote to *Beu Hiang*," came the monotonous confession from "Van Rankyn." "Sir Gregory has—has specimens—growing here—I—must live."

Averil Egerton pulled her fingers back into the cuff of her sleeve. Making a protection of the material, she gently caught hold of the sticky darts. Equally as gently she pulled the deadly things away.

Sir Gregory took a little step or two forward. He lifted his foot and kicked—a strange fluting noise lived for a while, then faded and was forever lost—in the ruin of the orchid called Paradise. Flowers and bulbs and leaves and stems—all were crushed into a squelchy mess.

As for "Van Rankyn," he had stolen away. One moment "he" was there and the next moment "he" was gone, in the instant their backs had been turned. Gone—gone away to die, victim of venom dwelling in beauty, dwelling in a flower—for Averil knew that the darts had got in their deadly work before she had plucked them out.

Or had "Van Rankyn," like the ghostly dancer on the dunes, flown away into the upper air, a wraith, an evanescence, tragically seeking another orchid to watch over and dwell in? That question Averil could not answer. She saw tears in Sir Gregory's eyes, but all she knew in her heart was joy.

* * * * *

One could not have seen in the fair-haired and gentle-voiced girl in the library, the next day, any resemblance to the grim and competent woman of the tragedy of the Paradise Orchid.

William Congreve, already a better man after his first experiments with the antidote to *Beu Hiang*, sat quietly watching her. Lacy, his head all bandages, smoked and admired—without any reticence; admiration, and more, lived in his pleasant eyes. As for old Sir Gregory, he asked questions.

"You think 'Van Rankyn' would

have suffered, had he lived and had the orchid also lived, in my keeping?"

"That depends on what she was," Averil said softly, conscious of Lacy's gaze and of the color it brought to her cheeks. "As a vestal of the flower, her mandarin masters had given her a task. She had to bring *Egertonii* to bloom, secure its living and fertilized spore, then, and then only, destroy it. They wanted that spore—to beget another family of emblems in America. Her failure meant her death, even if the darts themselves had not been lethal.

"But, as a creature of wanton flame, a dancer to a self-made and eerie music, an orchid's sweet yet terrible voice, a singing shadow rising from a flower of beauty now crushed and dead, she is now where no man can ever find her. She has gone back into that twilight world which our everyday lives cannot comprehend and which even our rare nocturnal dreams of ecstatic divination can only guess at. . . ."

WILLIAM CONGREVE spoke up shyly. "If the second assumption is true, why was it necessary for her to trick me into taking *Beu Hiang* to get me to work her will?"

"I don't know—I can only guess—even a supernatural agency must use the natural means at hand, and even a supernatural agency may not be immune to the poisons of this world, poisons themselves mysterious and defiant of all chemical analysis.

"The *Egertonii* was dangerous and mysterious, even to her. She knew that it secured fertilization by curious means—death-dealing means. *Egertonii* had three faculties: one of trembling movement, the second of alluring song, and the third of 'air' of intoxication.

"A small animal, or bird, for that matter, lured by the intoxication and curious to determine what other squeaking little animal or bird was immured in the great flower throat, would try to push into that throat. Immediately, a rain of viscid and poisonous discs, with golden pollen plumes on them, would rap out of

the throat and stick to the head of the marauder. They killed, quickly—and, after a few moments, the pollinated spore plumes bent and touched the ground—in that place, fed by the decaying instrument of fertilization, another orchid bloomed.

"My porters, in their nightly talks, after I found the bloom, gave me to understand all that I know. The bird-like notes gave rise to the belief that an outcast 'singer from the shadows,' out of Paradise—one of the *Koe se l'an*—had taken up abode in the plant. All the rest followed. The orchid was deadly, it was exquisitely beautiful—the *Hue Se Tsi L'an* adopted it as their emblem and embellished its natural wonders with necromancies of their own.

"They appointed *Kina-Iedlin* women as its virgin 'watchers'—*Kina-Iedlins*, whom some authorities swear are offsprings of Spanish women taken from some galleon in olden days, and sold to mandarins, a race of beautiful half-castes. If so, our 'Van Rankyn' was one of those.

"And if she was, she wasn't going to risk her life with those poisonous pollinated-spores. William was supposed to do that. But all's well that ends well. I'm only sorry about your two thousand pounds, Sir Gregory."

Sir Gregory smiled wryly. "I'd gladly bear the loss of the two thousand pounds," he said quietly, "if you could clear up certain other matters for me, for all of us."

"I know," Averil said softly. "The ghostly dancer on the dunes."

She shook her head and there was a momentary sadness in her eyes.

"Who was she?" she asked. "'Van Rankyn'?" Again she shook her head. "And 'Van Rankyn'? Was he—she—flesh and blood? Who danced in the sand-pit? Who blew on those pipes while the dance went on? Was it the orchid making music—the choir of the singing shadows. . . ."

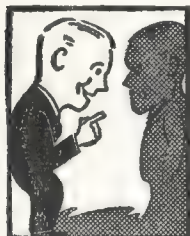
Her voice trailed off—Sir Gregory's rose in its place:

"Perhaps there are some questions that are best left unanswered. Let us be thankful that it is the orchid that is dead and we who are alive. Let us be thankful that you persuaded that creature to yield up the secret of the antidote for *Beu Hiang*. Eh, William? As for Lacy, there, I observe that he has other things to be thankful for. I'm very, very glad. . . ."

Averil blushed. And Lacy, by the fireside, knew that Averil Egerton, the world famous expert on orchids—the "intrepid" Miss Egerton of newspaper fame—had spoken from a heart that would soon forget its stern training—for a gentler and yet more passionate power—aye, for love.

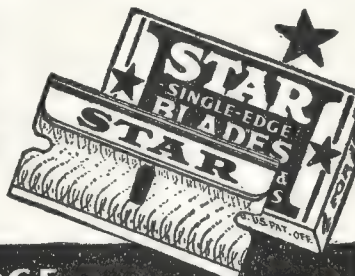
He knew the orchid called Paradise had killed her career—but through her clear eyes he saw another Paradise. They could both enter there.

Next Issue: LOGODA'S HEAD, by AUGUST W. DERLETH



WARNING TO CRANKS

If you want to stay cranky, look out for Star Single-edge Blades! They're so keen, they're so gentle with a tender skin that if you're not careful, you'll be smiling all over. Famous since 1880! Star Blades cost little: 4 for 10¢. Star Blade Division, Brooklyn, N. Y.



STAR SINGLE-EDGE BLADES 4 FOR 10¢
FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

The Curse of the House



Brian Droome stood in the doorway,
a knife in his hand

*Twelve Generations of Evil
Incarnate Rise to Avenge
the Abode of Secrets
Forbidden!*

By ROBERT BLOCH

*Author of "Eyes of the Mummy,"
"Feast in the Abbey," etc.*

"DID you ever hear of a
haunted house?"

I nodded slowly.

"Well, this case is different. I'm not afraid of a haunted house. My problem is that there's a house haunting me."

I sat silent for a long moment, staring at Will Banks blankly. He in turn regarded me calmly, his long, thin face impassive, and his gray eyes shining quite rationally as they focussed at random on various objects about my office.

But a slight, almost imperceptible twitching of the lips indicated the undoubtedly hyper-neurasthenic tendencies which his calm exterior hid. Nevertheless, I mused, the man had courage. Victims of hallucination and obsession are usually quite unstrung, and their schizoid tendencies

generally are uncontrollably manifested. But Will Banks had guts. This thought came quickly, then was overmastered by curiosity regarding his statement: "There's a house haunting me."

He had said it so matter-of-factly, so calmly. Too calmly. If he had been hysterical about it, or melodramatic, then it would indicate that he realized his plight as a victim of an obsession and was trying to fight it. But this acceptance implied implicit faith in his delusion. A bad sign.

"Perhaps you'd better tell me the story from the beginning," I said, a bit nervous myself. "There is a story, I presume?"

Banks' face, all at once, displayed genuine agitation. One hand rose unconsciously to brush back his blond, straight hair from the perspiring forehead. His mouth twitched more perceptibly.

"There is a story, Doctor," he said. "It isn't an easy story for me to tell and it won't be an easy story for you to—to believe. But it's true. Good God," he burst out, "don't you understand? That's what makes it so awful. It's true."

I ADOPTED a professional suavity as I ignored his emotion and offered him a cigarette. He held it in nervous fingers, without lighting it. His eyes sought mine imploringly.

"You aren't laughing at me, are you, Doctor? In your capacity—" (he could not bring himself to say "psychiatrist") "you must listen to a lot of things that sound peculiar. You do, don't you?"

I nodded, offering him a light. The first puff braced him.

"And Doctor, another thing. You fellows have some kind of medical oath, don't you? About violating confidences, and all that sort of thing? Because there are certain—"

"Tell your story, Mr. Banks," I said, briskly. "I promise you that I'll do what I can to help, but in order to help you I must have absolute sincerity from you."

Will Banks spoke.

"I told you that I'm haunted by a house. Well, that's true, strange as it may sound. But the circumstances are stranger still. To begin with, I'm going to ask you to believe in witchcraft. Get that, Doctor? I'm going to ask you to believe. I'm not arguing with you to convince you, although I think that can be done. I'm merely asking you. That in itself should convince you of my sincerity and my sanity. Unless I miss my guess, the sure indication of a psychotic personality is when the deluded puts up a long, fantastic argument to convince his hearer. Am I right?"

I nodded. It was true.

"Well, I'm merely asking you to believe in witchcraft for the duration of my tale. Just as I believed, years ago, when I went to Edinburgh. I had been a student of the lost sciences men choose to call the Black Arts. I was interested in the use ancient sorcerers made of mathematical symbols in their ceremonies—surmising that perhaps they were unconsciously employing geometric patterns which hold keys to the outer cosmos, even the Fourth Dimension recognized by modern-day scientists.

"I spent years in the fascinating pursuit of olden devil-worship, traveling to Naples, Prague, Budapest, Cologne. I shall not say what I came to believe, nor shall I do more than hint at the survival of demon-worship in the modern world. Enough that after a time I established connections with the vast underground system controlling hidden cults. I learned codes, signals, mysteries. I was accepted. And material for my monograph was being piled up.

"Then I went to Edinburgh—Edinburgh, where once *all* men believed in witchcraft. Talk about New England witch-baiters! That's childish stuff compared to the Scottish town where not twenty or thirty old hags, but thirty thousand witches and sorcerers once lived and lurked. Think of it; three hundred years ago there were thirty thousand of them, meeting in old houses, creeping through

underground tunnels in which lay buried the black secrets of their blood cults. *Macbeth* and *Tam O'Shanter* hint of it, but vaguely.

"Here in ancient Edinburgh I hoped to find the final corroboration for my theories. Here in the veritable witches' cauldron of wizardry, I settled and began to investigate. My underground connections served me, and after a time I was admitted to certain houses. In them I met people who still live a secret life of their own under the very surface of a quiet, modern Scottish city. Some of those dwellings are many hundreds of years old—still in use—some in use *from below*. No, I won't explain that.

"Then I met Brian Droome. 'Black Brian' Droome he was called, and in the coven he had another name. He was a gigantic man, bearded and swarthy. When we met I was reminded of descriptions concerning Gilles de Rais—reminded in more ways than that one. Indeed, he did have French blood, though his ancestors had settled in Edinburgh hundreds of years ago. They had built Brian's house, and it was this house that I particularly wanted to see.

"For Brian Droome's ancestors had been sorcerers. I knew that. In the infamous secret history of European cults, the clan of Droome occupied a detestable eminence. During the great witchcraft craze of three hundred years ago, when the king's soldiers came seeking the burrows in which the wizards lay hidden, Droome House was one of the first to be ransacked.

"For the Droomes presided over a truly terrible cult, and in their great cellars fully thirty members of the family died before the muskets of the outraged militia. And yet the house itself had survived. While thousands of ransacked dwellings had burned in those terrible nights, Droome House had been left gaunt and deserted, but untouched. Some of the Droomes escaped.

"Those surviving Droomes returned. The worship went on, but in secret now; the Droomes were a

devout race, not easily moved to abandon their religious tenets. The house stood, and the Faith stood. Until this day.

"But now only Brian Droome remained, of all the line. He lived alone in the old house, a reputed student of sorcery who seldom attended the gatherings out on the hills where surviving believers still invoked the Black Father. My connections secured me an introduction, for I was greatly desirous of seeing the ancient dwelling and looking at certain inscriptions and designs which legend said were engraved on the stony walls of the cellars.

"Brian Droome. Swarthy, bearded, burning-eyed! Unforgettable! His personality was as compelling as a serpent's—and as evil. Generations had moulded him into the epitome of a sorcerer, a wizard, a seeker after things forbidden. The heritage of four hundred years had made a wizard of Droome.

IN boyhood he read the black books in his old house; in manhood he walked the shadows of its halls in a palpable atmosphere of witchery. And yet, he was not a silent man, he could talk a blue streak, and was remarkably well-informed and well-educated—in a word, cultured. But he was not *civilized*. Brian Droome was a pagan, and when he spoke of his beliefs he had the trusting manner of a fearless child.

"I met him several times at—gatherings. Then I requested the pleasure of visiting him at his home. I had to wheedle, I admit, because he was damnably reluctant. On the excuse of showing him certain notes of my own, I at last obtained his grudging consent. Others expressed genuine amazement when I told them; it seems that Droome had never allowed strangers in the great house was alone in the sense that he entertained no *human* company.

"So I called on Brian Droome. When I went, as I told you, I believed in witchcraft; believed, that is, that the art had been practised and had a scientific basis—although

I did not concede that its achievements were in any way connected with the supernatural.

"But when I came in sight of the House of Droome, I began to change my mind. I didn't realize the full extent of the change until later, but even at the time the first glimpse of Brian Droome's dwelling filled me—filled me—with horror!"

THE last words seemed to explode out of Will Banks. He went on, more softly than before.

"Now you must mark this. The house stood on a hillside against the bleeding sunset sky. It was a two-story house, with twin gables on either side of a peaked roof. The house rose out of the hill, like a gigantic head emerging from a grave. The gables were horns against the heavens. Two jutting eaves were ears. The door was wide as a grinning mouth. There was an upper window on each side of the door.

"I won't tell you that the windows were like eyes. They were eyes. Through their narrow slits they peered at me, watched me approach. I felt it as I have never felt anything before—that this house, this centuried dwelling, possessed a life of its own; that it was aware of me, saw me, heard me coming.

"I walked up the path, nonetheless, because I didn't know what was to come. I walked up and the mouth opened—I mean, the door opened—and Brian let me in. It opened, I tell you. Brian didn't open it. That was awful.

"It was just as though I had walked into a monster's head; a thinking monster's head. I could almost feel the brain buzzing about me, pulsing with thoughts as black as the shadows in the long, narrow, throat-like hallway through which we walked.

"Bear with me while I give a few details. There was a long hall, with a stairway at the further end, branching off into side rooms. The first side room to the left was the study Brian took me to. How well I know the geography of that house! Why

shouldn't I know it? I see it every night in my dreams.

"We talked. Of course it's important to remember what we talked about, but I really cannot recall. Brian, immensely forceful personality though he was, paled into insignificance beside the weight exerted by that ghastly house. If Brian Droome was the product of twelve generations, then this house was the twelve generations incarnate.

"It was something that had stood for three hundred and eighty years, filled with life all that time. Filled with evil life, filled with weird experiments, mad cries, hoarse prayers, and still hoarser answers. Hundreds of feet had trod its floors, hundreds of visitors had come and departed. Some, many in fact, had not departed. And of those, legend said that some had not been men. Blood had run in a slow, throbbing stream.

"And the house—not Brian Droome but the house—was an aged person who had seen all of birth and life and death and what lay beyond. Here was the real wizard, the true viewer of all secrets. This house had seen it all. It lived, it leered down from the hill.

"While Brian talked and I automatically replied, I kept thinking of the house. This great study, a monstrous room, filled with massive bookcases and long tables burdened with excess tomes; this great study with its olden oak furniture, suddenly seemed in my mind's eye to be stripped of all extraneous objects. It became an empty room again—just a vast wooden expanse with huge timbers that formed the rafters overhead.

"I imagined it like that, dusty and deserted, robbed of all signs of visible habitation. Still that damnable impression of life remained. An empty room here was never empty. The thought agitated me.

"It agitated me so much that I had to talk about it to Brian Droome. He smiled, slowly, as I described my sensations. Then he spoke.

"'It is a much older house than even you imagine,' he said in his

deep burring voice. 'I who have dwelt here all my life still do not know what further secrets it may possess. It was built originally by Cornac Droome, in 1561. You may be interested in knowing that at this time the hill on which it stood supported several Druidic stones, originally part of the circle-pattern.

"Some of these were laid in the foundations. Others still stand in the upper cellar. And another thing, my dear Banks—this house was not built, it *accumulated*.

"It was reared upward for two stories, that is true. The gables and eaves and roof were then as they are now, and the second floor remains unchanged. But the house had once only a single cellar. It was not until the Faith prospered that we built again. And we built *downward*.

"We built downward, I say. Just as a church spire rears toward Heaven, we of the Faith appropriately build toward our own Kingdom. First a second cellar, and then a third; finally passages under the hill for secret goings-forth when under duress.

"When Droome House was entered, the King's men never discovered the lower cellars, and that was well, for they would not have liked what they saw, being unbelievers and sacrilegious. Since then we have been wary of visitors, and the covens no longer meet; the lower cellars have fallen into disuse. Still, we have held many private ceremonies, for the Droomes had secret pacts of their own requiring certain regular rites. But in the past three hundred years we and Droome House have lived together in solitude."

Will Banks paused, drew breath. His lips twitched, he went on:

"I listened eagerly to his admissions concerning the cellars which I so desired to inspect. But something of his discourse puzzled me—his use of the word 'we' interchangeably, so that at times it meant the family, at times himself, and at other times it actually seemed to imply the very house!

"He arose and stood by the wall,

and I noted how his fingers softly caressed the ancient wood. It was not the caress of a connoisseur handling a rare tapestry, not the caress a master bestows upon a dog. It was the caress of a lover—the soft stroking motion of understanding and concealed desire.

"This old house and I understand one another," Droome burred. His smile held no humor. 'We take care of one another, even though today we are alone. Droome House protects me even as I guard the secrets of Droome House.' He stroked the woodwork gently."

BANKS paused again, swallowed hard before continuing. "By this time a revulsion had set in. Either I was mad, or Brian Droome was. I wanted my information and then I wanted to get out. I wanted to get out, I realized, because I never wanted to see this house again. I never wanted even to think about it again. And it wasn't the well-known fear of enclosed places—It wasn't claustrophobia, Doctor. I just couldn't stand the place, or rather, the unnatural thoughts it aroused. But a stubbornness was in my soul. I did not want to leave without the information I had come for.

"I rather bungled things because of the unreasoning panic I felt, the unreasoning panic that rose in my heart as he lighted candles in the gray room and peopled the house with walking shadows. I asked him almost point-blank if I could visit the cellars. I told him why, told him about inspecting certain symbols on the walls. He was standing by a candelabrum on the wall, lighting the waxen taper. As it flared up, a corresponding flare flamed in his eyes.

"No, Will Banks,' he said. 'You cannot see the cellars of Droome House.'

"Just that and nothing more. The glare, and the flat refusal. He gave no reason, he did not hint of mysteries I had no right to know, he did not threaten harm should I insist. No, not Brian Droome. But the house—the house did! The house

hinted. The house *threatened*. The shadows seemed to coalesce on the walls, and a gathering oppression fell upon me, seized me in impalpable tentacles that strangled the soul. I cannot express it save in this melodramatic wise—the house *hated* me.

"I was silent. I did not ask again. Brian Droome tugged at his black beard. His smile signified that the incident was closed.

"'You'll be going soon,' he said. 'Before that, a drink with me to stay your journey.'

"He walked out of the room to prepare the drink. Then a mad impulse seized me. Yet the impulse had reasons behind it. After all, I had come to Edinburgh solely for this end. For years I had studied, and here lay a clue I sorely needed. It was my only chance of obtaining the information I desired, and if the inscriptions were what I fancied, I could jot them down in a notebook in a moment. This was the first reason.

"The second was more complicated. The house—it threatened me. Like a mouse in the grip of a cat, I knew my doom but could not keep still. I had to squirm, wriggle. Once deprived of Droome's company, even for a moment, panic gripped me like that cat, pouncing on the helpless mouse. I felt as though eyes were watching me, invisible claws extending on every hand. I was unable to remain in this room, I had to move. Of course I could have followed Brian Droome, but the other reason impelled me.

"I determined to enter the cellar. I rose quietly, on tiptoe, went down the hall. It was dark and still. Now don't misunderstand. It wasn't *haunted*. This was not a mystery-thriller mansion, with cobwebs and bats and creaking noises. It was merely dark, and the dark was old. Light hadn't shone here for three hundred years, nor sane laughter broken the stillness. It was darkness that should have been dead, but it was alive. And it oppressed and terrified a thousand times more than the sight of a ghost.

"I found myself trembling when I located the cellar door with the steps below. The candle I had slipped into my pocket before leaving the study came into my hands, wet with sweat from my palms. I lit it and descended the stairs. I left the house's head and entered its heart.

"I'll be brief here. The cellar was huge and there were many rooms, yet there was no dust. I won't go any further to describe the signs of life. There was a chapel and long walls with the symbols I sought, and an altar that undoubtedly must have been one of the Druid stones Brian referred to.

"But I didn't notice that. I never did see what I came to see. Because in the second chapel room I kept looking at the rafters. The long brown beams overhead against the cellar roof. The long brown beams with the great hooks on them. The great steel hooks. The great steel hooks that held dangling things! White, dangling things! Human skeletons!

"**H**UMAN skeletons that gleamed as they hung in the breeze from the opened door. Human skeletons still so new as to remain hanging articulated. New skeletons on hooks on the long brown rafters.

"There was blood on the floor and strips of flesh, and on the altar a thing still lay—not cleanly stripped—yet. There was a vacant hook waiting, but the thing lay there on the altar before the black statue of Satan.

"And I thought of Brian Droome's mention of *private rites* still carried on by his family. I thought of his reticence concerning guests, and his refusal to allow me entrance to the cellar. I thought of the further cellars that lay below; if this were the heart of the house what might lie beyond in the *soul*?

"Then I looked back at the dancing skeletons that trod the air with bony feet and swung their gleaming arms as they grinned down on me in mockery. They hung on the rafters of the House of Droome, and the

House of Droome guarded them as one guards a secret.

"The House of Droome was with me in the cellar, watching me, waiting for my reaction. I dared not show it. I stood there, in fancy feeling forces quiver about me. Forces radiating from the bloodstained walls. Forces bursting from the outlandish designs cut in the stones. Forces rising from the floor, from depths still further below.

"Then I felt human eyes. Brian Droome stood in the doorway."

BANKS was now on his feet. His eyes were staring. He was reliving the scene.

"I threw the candle and struck him in the face with the burning end. Then I snatched up the unmentionable basin from the altar top and I hurled it at his head. He went down. I was upon him then, desperately tearing at his throat. I had to act first, because when he had stood there in the doorway I had seen the knife in his hand. A cutting-knife, a sawing-knife. And I remembered the thing still lying on the altar. That was why I moved first, and now I was wrestling with him on the stone floor, trying to wrest the knife away. I was no match for him.

"He was a giant and he picked me up and carried me to the center of the room, carried me toward the vacant hook that gleamed in the line of skeletons. Its steel barb projected outward, and I knew he meant to hang me there. My hands fought for that knife as he forced me down that grinning line of eyeless watchers. He lifted me high, until my head was on a level with his own madly distorted face.

"Then my hands found his wrist. Desperation gave me strength. I drove his wrenched arm back, upward. The knife entered his belly in one great thrust. The force spun him around and he fell back. His own neck caught against the steel hook hanging from the rafter. As his great arms released me he was pinioned. Blood gushed from his

corded throat as I plunged the knife home again and again.

"He died there, on the hook, and he mumbled, 'The Curse of my House upon you.' I heard the curse through red hazes of madness. It was not dramatically impressed on my mind—then. Instead, there was only the gnawing horror of our struggle and his death; the fear which caused me to race up those steps without turning back, grope through darkness to the study—and set fire to the house.

"Yes, I burned Droome House, as one burns a witch or warlock; as they destroyed wizards in the olden days. I burned Droome House so that fire might purify and flame consume the evil that leaped at me as I ran out of the blazing dwelling. I swear the flames nearly trapped me as I ran, although they had only risen a moment before. I swear I clawed at the door as though it were a living thing that grappled with me, seeking to hold me back.

"Only when I stood below the hill and watched the red glow arise did I remember Brian's words. 'The Curse of my House upon you.' I thought of them as the door broke into a gash of scarlet flame, and when the people came and clustered about I still remained, heedless of danger, until I saw the walls of that accursed mansion crumble into glowing ash, and the place of evil destroyed forever. Then I knew peace, for a while.

"But now—Doctor—I'm haunted." Will Banks' voice became a whisper.

"I left Edinburgh at once, dropped my studies. I had to, of course. Fortunately I was not incriminated in the affair, but my nerves had been shattered. I was on the verge of a true psychotic condition. I was advised to travel, regain my health and strength to fortify my mental outlook. So I traveled.

"In England I saw it first. I was spending a week with friends at Manchester; they had a country place just outside the industrial town. We rode about the estate one

afternoon and I lagged behind to rest my horse. It was about sunset when I rounded a bend and saw the hill. The sky was red above it.

"I saw the hill first. And then, something grew on it. It grew. You've read about ghosts, Doctor? About how they manifest themselves with ectoplasm? They say it's like watching a picture come out in the solution in which a print is developed. It comes gradually, takes shape. The colors fill in.

"It was the house that did that! Droome House! Slowly, wavering lines grew solid as I recognized the damnable head that leered out of the hillside. The window-eyes were red with slanted sunlight, and they looked straight at me. 'Come in Will Banks,' they invited. I stared for a full minute, blinking and hoping with all my heart that the vision would go away. It didn't.

"Then I spurred my horse to a gallop and fled down the road to my friends, never looking back.

"'Who lives on the hill?' I gasped. Jessens, the banker friend I was staying with, gave me a look. Even before he spoke, I knew. 'No one,' he said. 'Trying to pull my leg, are you?'

"I kept still. But I left the next day. Went to the Alps. No, I didn't see the Droome House on the Matterhorn. I had a good solid six months of peace. But on the train back to Marseilles I looked out of the window at sunset and—there it was. 'Come in, Will Banks,' the eyes invited. I turned away. That same night I went to Naples.

"After that it was a race. For six months, eight months at a time I seemed safe. But if sunset found me near a hillside, be it in Norway or Burma, the damned vision re-occurred. I've put it all down. Twenty-one times in the past ten years.

"I grew clever enough about it all. After the third or fourth manifestation I realized that this combination of sunset and hillside was necessary to produce the image—for ghost I would not admit it was. I avoided being out in the open after dusk be-

gan. But in the last year or so, I've grown more hopeless.

"Travel has proved fruitless. I cannot escape it. Naturally, the story has remained with me alone. I dared not tell anyone, and several occasions served to convince me that nobody saw the apparition save myself. What has frightened me is the later developments of the thing.

"Now, when I force myself to gaze steadily at the house, I see it for a longer and longer time. And each time—this in the last three years, I have finally computed—that house appears nearer and nearer to the spot where I am standing.

"Don't you understand what it means? Sooner or later I shall be before the house, at the very door! And one sunset I may find myself inside! Inside, under the long brown rafters with the hooks, and Brian all bloody and the house waiting for me. Nearer and nearer. Yet God knows I'm always on the road when I see it up there on the hill. But I get closer to it every time, and if I enter that place of ghosts I know *something* waits for me; the spirit of that house—"

WILL BANKS did not stop of his own accord—I stopped him. "Shut up!" I rapped sharply.

"What?"

"Shut up!" I repeated. "Now listen to me, Will Banks. I've listened to you, and I haven't commented; I expect the same courtesy in return."

He calmed down at once, as I knew he would—I was not a psychiatrist for nothing, and psychiatrists know when to let their patients talk and when to shut them up.

"I've listened to you," I said, "without any gibes about witchcraft or fantasies. Now suppose you listen to my theories with the same respect. To begin with, you're suffering from a common obsession. Nothing serious, just a common, everyday obsession—a cousin to the one that makes a habitual drunkard see pink elephants even when not actually suffering from *delirium tremens*."

Banks bridled. I stared him down.

"It's undoubtedly a symptom of a guilt-complex," I said matter of factly. "You killed a man named Brian Droome. Don't bother to deny it. We'll admit it. We won't go into the motives, we won't even examine justification. You killed Brian Droome under very peculiar circumstances. Something about the house in which the deed occurred was strongly impressed upon your susceptible subconscious mind. In a state of tension following the killing, you fired the house. In your subconscious, the destruction of the house loomed as a greater crime than the destruction of the man. Right?"

"It did, Doctor—it did!" Banks wailed. "The house had a life of its own, a concentrated life that was greater than that of a single person. That house was Brian Droome, and all his wizard ancestors. It was Evil, and I destroyed it. Now it seeks vengeance."

"Wait a minute," I drawled. "Wait—a—minute. You're not telling me, I'm telling *you*. All right. In consequence of your guilty feelings this complex has arisen. This hallucination is a mental projection of your own guilt; a symptom of the weight you felt while keeping the story a secret.

"Understand? In psychoanalysis we have come to refer to confession as a *cathartic method* whereby the patient is often relieved of mental difficulties by merely telling frankly the story of his troubles. Confession is good for the soul.

"It may be that all of your problem has been solved by simply unburdening yourself to me here. If not, I shall endeavor to probe more deeply. There are some things I wish to learn regarding your association with witchcraft cults; I will need to find out certain details of your mental attitude regarding superstitions and the like."

"Don't you see?" Banks muttered. "You can't understand. This is real. You must know the supernatural as I do—"

"There is no supernatural," I

stated. "There is merely the natural. If one speaks of *supernatural* one might as well speak of the *subnatural*, a manifest absurdity. Extensions of physical laws I grant, but such things merely occur in a disordered brain."

"I don't care what you believe," Banks said. "Help me, Doctor, only help me. I can't bear it much longer. Believe that. I would never have come to you otherwise. Even drugs won't keep me from dreaming. Wherever I go I see that cursed house rising up out of hills, grinning at me and beckoning. It gets nearer and nearer. Last week I saw it here—in America. Four hundred years ago it rose in Edinburgh; I burnt it ten years ago. Last week I saw it. Very close. I was only fifteen feet away from the door, and the door was open. Help me, Doctor—you must!"

"I will. Pack your things, Banks. You and I are going fishing."

"What?"

"You heard me. Be ready at noon tomorrow. I'll bring the car around. I have a little lodge up in the Berkshires, and we can put in a week or so of loafing around. Meanwhile I'll get a slant at you. You'll have to co-operate, of course—but we'll discuss those details later. Here now, just do as I say. And I think if you try a tablespoonful of this in some brandy tonight before you go to bed you won't have any more house-parties in your dreams. Noon tomorrow, then. Good-by."

IT was noon the next day. Banks wore a gray suit and a nervous frown. He didn't feel like talking, that was evident. I chatted gayly, laughed a lot at my own stories, and swung the car up through the hills all afternoon.

I had it all planned out in my own mind, of course. The first notes on the case were down. I'd handle him easily the first few days, watch him for betraying signs, and then really get to work from the analytical side. Today I could afford to put him at ease.

We drove on, Banks sitting silent until the shadows came.

"Stop the car."

"Eh?"

"Stop it—it's getting toward sunset."

I drove on, unheeding. He shouted. He threatened. I hummed. The redness deepened in the west. Then he began to plead.

"Please stop. I don't want to see it. Go back. Go back—there's a town we just passed. Let's stay there. Please. I can't bear to see it again. Close! Doctor, for God's sake—"

"We'll arrive in half an hour," I said. "Don't be a child. I'm with you."

I piloted the car between the green borders of the encircling hills. We headed west against the fading sun. It shone redly on our faces, but Banks was white as a sheet beneath its glare as he cowered in the seat beside me. He mumbled under his breath. All at once his body tensed and his fingers dug into my shoulder with maniacal strength.

"Stop the car!" he screamed.

I applied the brakes. He was cracking.

"There it is!" he yelled, with something that was almost triumph in his voice. Something masochistic, as though he welcomed the ordeal to come. "There's the house, on that hill. Do you see it? There!"

Of course it was just a bare hillside, some fifty feet back from the road.

"It's grinning!" he cried. "Droome is watching me. Look at the windows. They wait for me."

I WATCHED him closely as he moved out of the car. Should I stop him? No, of course not. Perhaps if he went through with it this time he'd throw off his obsession. At any rate, if I could observe the incident I might get the clues necessary to unraveling the threads of his twisted personality. Let him go.

It was awful to watch, I admit it. He was screaming about the "House of Droome" and the "Curse" as he went up the hillside. Then I noticed

that he was sleep-walking. Self-hypnotized.

In other words, Banks didn't know he was moving. He thought he was still in the car. That explained his story of how each time the imaginary house seemed closer. He unconsciously approached the focal point of his hallucination, that was all. Like an automaton he strained up the green grade.

"I'm at the door," he shouted. "It's close—God, Doctor—it's close. The damned thing is creeping toward me, and the door is open. What shall I do?"

"Go inside," I called. I wasn't sure he could hear me in his state, but he did. I counted on such an action to break the thread for him; watched his reactions carefully.

His tall form was silhouetted against the sunset as he walked. And now one hand reached out, his feet rose as though crossing an actual threshold. It was—I admit it—horrible to watch. It was the grotesque pantomime beneath a scarlet sky, the mimicry of a madman.

"I'm inside now. Inside!" Bank's voice rose with fear. "I can feel the house all around me. Alive. I can—see it!"

Without knowing it, I too, compelled by a fear I could not name, had left the car. I started for the hill. "Stay with it, Banks," I called. "I'm coming."

"The hall is dusty," Banks mumbled. "Dusty. It would be after ten years of desertion. Ten years ago it burned. The hall is dusty. I must see the study."

As I watched in revulsion, Banks walked precisely along the hilltop, turned as though in a doorway, and entered—yes, I said entered—something that wasn't there.

"I'm here," he muttered. "It's the same. But it's dark. It's too dark. And I can feel the house. I want to get out." He turned again and made an exit.

"It won't let me go!"

That scream sent me scrambling up the hillside.

"I can't find the door now. I

can't find it, I tell you! It's locked me in! I can't get out—the House won't let me. I must see the cellar first, it says. It says I must see the cellar."

HE turned and walked precisely, sickeningly. Around a bend. A hand opened an imaginary door. And then—did you ever see a man walk down non-existent stairs? I did. It halted me on my charge up the hillside. Will Banks stood on the hill at sunset walking down cellar stairs that were not there. And then he began to shriek.

"I'm here in the cellar, and the long brown beams are still overhead. They are here, too. They are hanging, grinning. And why—it's you, Brian. On the hook. On the hook where you died. You're still bleeding, Brian Droome, after all these years. Still bleeding on the floor. Mustn't step in the blood. Blood. Why are you smiling at me, Brian? You are smiling, aren't you? But then—you must be alive. You can't be. I killed you. I burned this house. You can't be alive and—the house can't be alive. What are you going to do?"

I had to get up the hill, I couldn't stand hearing him shriek such things

into empty air. I had to stop him, now!

"Brian!" he shrieked. "You're getting down off the hook! No—the beam is falling. The house—I must run—where are the cellar steps? Where are they? Don't touch me, Brian—the beam fell down and you're free, but keep away from me. I must find the steps. Where are they? The house is moving. No—it's crumbling!"

I made the top of the hill, panting. Banks screamed on, and then his hands went out.

"God! The house is falling—it's falling on me. Help! Let me out! The things on the brown beams are holding me—let me out! The beams are falling—help—let me out!"

Suddenly, just before my outstretched hands could reach him, Banks flung up his arms as though to ward off an impending blow, then crumpled to the grass.

I knelt at his side. Of course I did not enter a house to do it. It was under the dying sun that I gazed into his pain-contorted face and saw that he was dead. It was under a dying sun that I lifted the body of Will Banks and saw—that his chest had been crushed as though by a falling beam.

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NEXT ISSUE
THE CREEPER IN DARKNESS
The Story of a Soul Possessed
By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.



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EYES OF THE

By AUGUST W. DERLETH and
MARK SCHORER

FAMOUS AUTHORS OF UNCANNY TALES

CHAPTER I *Voodoo Murder*

IT HAPPENED so quickly that I was aware only of the swift pattering of running footsteps, of a dark form hurtling through the open French windows of my suburban Chicago home, and of the doors themselves swinging shut under the im-

petus of a quick, frantic push. Then the lights went out.

But I had turned just quickly enough to see the light from my table reflected in a fear-haunted face bending downward. It was Monica Crittendon's. In a moment her voice came softly out of the darkness.

"Don't move—don't talk. I think I got away from them!"



A Voodoo Zombie Haunts a Modern City

SERPENT



Ulrika slipped close to Monica, knife in hand

A COMPLETE NOVELET OF THE UNDEAD

as Helpless Victims Cry for Vengeance!

I came swiftly to her side. She was standing tense and still, her eyes fixed on the deserted street beyond the hedge that marked my lawn. She stood stiffly at my side, trembling a little, drawing her breath in quick, agitated gasps, and looking directly toward the patch of light sprawled across the street beneath the lamp.

Abruptly two burly forms moved beneath the light and vanished in the darkness beyond. She breathed a deep sigh of relief. In the darkness I could feel her relaxation, feel the rigid tenseness leave her body as she swayed toward me.

"Thank God," she sighed. She turned and put on the lamp. "They've lost me," she said.

"What the devil's up?" I asked. "You're white as a sheet."

I passed my arm reassuringly around her shoulders. "There's no need to be frightened, Monica," I said. "Tell me what's wrong."

She hesitated a moment, then opened her right hand and let something fall to the table in the light under the lamp. "Look at that," she said.

IT WAS a little black object, painted with red stripes. I took it up wondering, turning it about in my hand. It had a head and limbs, and was obviously a crude carving of a human form. A little leather bag was bound around its waist, tightly against its body.

My heart seemed to stop beating for a suffocating second.

"Where did you get this?" I asked sharply.

"It was found this morning on Commissioner Allen's desk," she said, in a low voice. Monica Crittendon was Commissioner Allen's private secretary.

"Found?" I asked. "By whom?"

"By me. When I came to the office this morning it was lying on the top of Commissioner Allen's desk. I didn't know what it was then, and left it there. But when the commissioner came in and saw it—I saw his face, white and pale—he was frightened!" She indicated the thing in

the glow of the table lamp. "Do you know what it is?"

"It's a voodoo *ouanga*," I said, trying to be casual. "It's a curious thing—the death warning of the Negro *culte des morts*!—a monstrous and horrible group who worshiped Damballah, the serpent god—a cult now stamped out."

She took the *ouanga* from me, looked at it for a moment, and then dropped it to the table again, shuddering. "You're wrong about the cult being stamped out," she said. "Just after the commissioner engaged me, I discovered there was something big going on under cover—something he wasn't letting me in on completely, nor many others. But he made a few arrests last week—a Negro cab driver, a mulatto who danced in a downtown night club, and a janitor in an apartment building. I think that was why he was threatened, why he received this warning."

"How does it come that you have the *ouanga*?" I asked.

Monica Crittendon looked up at me in astonishment. "Haven't you seen the papers?" she challenged. "The commissioner is dead!"

She shoved a newspaper across the table, letting it fall so that the headlines showed. I read:

HEART ATTACK FATAL TO
COMMISSIONER ALLEN:
DIES AT DESK

"That was what we gave the papers," she said, her voice trembling. "But the commissioner didn't die of a heart attack. He died suddenly, just after I had left the office to transcribe some letters. I had gone only twenty steps or so from his door when I heard his muffled scream. I ran back into his office. He was dead. *His throat had been torn out!*"

I came to my feet, startled.

"Oh, God, how awful it was!" She closed her eyes in an effort to forget the horrible picture seared on her memory. "The commissioner had left a statement about the Negro trouble; he had been writing it when I left the room. Yet, when we came back into that room the statement was gone, all except a tiny fragment

clutched in his left hand. And I had just come from that room!"

How near Monica Crittendon was to hysteria I now saw. I moved around the table to her side. She rose suddenly.

"Listen!" she gasped, standing tense, one hand at her throat, the other supporting herself against the table behind her. "I heard something. Perhaps they've found me!"

Her fright reached out and gripped me. I shook it off.

I moved quickly to the French doors, sank to my knees, drew the draperies gently aside. The street light shone on a deserted street. There was nothing there. I crossed the room and looked out into the more shadowed lawn on the other side of the house. Again, nothing.

I drew up a chair and took Monica's hands in mine. They were cold, and she was trembling. "Monica," I said, "you're going to stay here to-night and forget about this."

She clenched my hands. "Forget? I can't. I've learned enough—put two and two together—to know that there's a horrible Voodoo cult, a death cult, the cult of the serpent, here in Chicago. They've done strange, hellish things, some of them supernatural. The commissioner knew, but he feared them. He discovered somehow that a beautiful, Creole woman, a Voodoo priestess, was the leader, the *mamaloï*. This *ouanga* was a warning. Now he's dead!"

As I bent to comfort her, my eyes caught the faintest suggestion of movement about the black curtains across the French doors, a shadowy undulation in the stillness. That was all. I watched the curtains warily—nothing happened. Then I looked at Monica.

"Someone is watching every move we make," she said, in a low voice.

"Nonsense!" I said, but I myself was not convinced. "What was that woman's name?" I asked then. "Didn't he put it down before—he died?"

She nodded. "It was on the scrap of paper in his hand—just one line, underscored. 'Look for *Ulrika Bayne*!'"

She reached into her bosom and drew out a thin packet of papers which she threw on the table into the light under the lamp. Her eyes closed, and she spoke in an oddly flat voice. "I looked her up. A Voodoo priestess in New Orleans in 1906. Those documents tell the story, everything Allen could get on her. But it doesn't make any difference. *Ulrika Bayne has been dead for twenty-five years!*"

STARTLED, I examined the papers. There was not much in them, but one fact seemed indisputable—Ulrika Bayne was dead. She had died attempting to make her escape from a hideout just outside New Orleans to which she had been traced. She had been shot by a special police officer from Haiti. The special officer, Gabriel Lantora, had traced three horrible murders to her. She had been shot, furthermore, in sight of some twenty people.

"How did you get these papers?" I asked.

"They were in the commissioner's desk. I don't think *they* knew he had them."

"They? Who?"

She looked at me helplessly. "*They*—those who killed him and took his report. Or perhaps they knew we could get copies from New Orleans." She paused suddenly, her eyes feverish. "I'll be accused of the murder! Don't you see? The commissioner's office was on the seventh floor—all windows locked and barred—the only door was in plain sight all the time, and I had come out of that door only a few minutes before he died. It won't be long before I'll be put under arrest—"

"Good God!" I burst out, horrified. "That's ridiculous. You had no motive!"

"Motive or no motive, the police will say I was the only one in position to have done it. That's why I came directly to you. You've got to help me! I was the only one who *could* have committed the murder. But I didn't. So someone else did. Yet for someone else to have done it

was impossible. Then the impossible is true! That's the horrible logic of it! Look—this passage—!"

I looked as directed, impelled by her fright. The passage read:

Evidence had fallen into the hands of Bishop Peale that certain demoniac rites were being practised by Haitian Negroes and some Creoles of New Orleans, implicating several white persons. An investigation by the police disclosed a shocking cult of murder and nameless criminal practices.

Through the agency of Gabriel Lantora, special police officer, who had sworn to find the woman at the head of the cult because of an injury she had done to his family in Haiti, it was brought forward that the cult members embodied many strange and unbelievable powers—not the least of these being the power of dissociating from their bodies the spirit or astral and traveling in this state at will.

Lantora claimed to have the same power, and certain evidence which he personally unearthed tended to support this improbable statement.

Lantora claimed that two prominent men in New Orleans were murdered by astrals, very possibly by the astral of the priestess sought. There was also a strong belief current among the Negroes that it was impossible ever to kill any member of the sect. They supposedly had weird rites which they employed to raise bodies from the dead. But these bodies, Lantora claimed, were never fully alive, being used only as stations for the spirit's return.

Since Lantora continued to claim that Ulrika Bayne had murdered the two victims as above, both of whom had been found with throats torn out, Bishop Peale exerted his influence to keep this line of investigation from the public. Lantora, however, demanded that the body of Ulrika Bayne be burned, since this would destroy the astral's station, making it impossible for the astral ever to return to earth. Bishop Peale prevented this, since it would have been a concession to superstition.

I looked up.

"It was the only way Commissioner Allen could have been murdered," Monica said. "I don't want to believe it, but I've got to. You've got to believe it, too. If you don't, you can't help me."

"I still believe humans are murdered by humans," I said, with a confidence I was far from feeling. "But even so, I can help. The first practical step is to find Lantora."

At this point the door of my library opened gently and my sister Harriet

came in, greeting Monica effusively. "Are you expecting anyone tonight?" she asked me.

I shook my head. "Why?"

"I thought you should know. There has been a man out under the trees on the lawn for the last half hour, prowling around. It has upset me. And there's been a woman, I think, in front."

Monica half rose from her chair, but sank back again. I ran quickly to the window and from there to the French doors; I saw nothing outside.

I turned to Harriet. "You'd better go upstairs and keep a weather eye open. While you're there, get a room ready for Monica—she's staying tonight. And if you see anyone, rap three times on the floor if he's in front, and twice for the lawn in back of the house."

Harriet hesitated. "Why not call the police?"

A sharp cry escaped Monica. "No, Harriet," she said. "We don't want the police in this!"

The door closed behind a puzzled Harriet. Then Monica came running to me. She threw herself into my arms, terribly shaken. "They've found me," she whispered. "I've felt it all along. I told you we were watched. The woman knew!"

CHAPTER II

The Woman from Hell

I HELD Monica's shaking body firmly in my arms. I felt fear creeping into my heart, a new fear, apparently causeless, yet having to do with some change that was taking place in the room. Then I saw what it was—the lamp on the table was growing dim, slowly, as if someone had cut in on the electricity. Slowly, surely, the light went down, dwindling almost to nothing, until Monica's face was only a white patch in the eerie darkness.

A cloud of blackness seemed to swirl into the room, cloaking the

lamp. Then I saw *her*—and Monica, sensing her, turned and saw her, too.

Standing against the black curtains drawn across the French doors was a tall and singularly beautiful woman. Fiery, venomous eyes were fixed on us; the unholy glance roved from Monica to me and back again. We stood paralyzed, unable to move, able only to look.

A long, dark cloak enveloped the creature's slim shape. Limned against the faint light of the street-lamp shining through the small space in the partly opened French doors, the cloak seemed to billow slightly here and there, as if disturbed by the breeze. The creature's olive features were lit up by a strange, unholy light. The mouth was an evilly smiling slash in the dark shadow of her face. She stood there holding us rooted by her presence, swaying a little, undulating from side to side as if a wind were bending her there.

And then she came a step forward. Monica and I did not move—we couldn't. We thought we were shouting, but our paralyzed vocal chords gave out no sound. Maddeningly, the womanish creature waited, making us feel the unutterable hatred in her eyes, glowing strangely in the blackness. Then, with a lithe, cat-like movement, she threw something to the table, so that it fell on top of the papers beneath the lamp.

FROM the corner of my eye I saw it, and even in that almost dark room, where the light that came from the lamp was of the faintest, I knew, perhaps from instinct, or perhaps from the horrible suspicion of the woman's identity, that it was the black and red *ouanga* of the *culte des morts*.

It snapped my tension. Quickly I jumped around the table, putting myself between the woman and Monica.

But something in the attitude of our strange visitor caught me. A subtle change had come over that sinister face, demoniacally beautiful, like a living mask of hate. Where before the woman had been triumphant, taunting, she now seemed to

be hesitant, looking beyond me with an expression closely akin to fear.

She was looking at the door of the library. My God, I thought, Harriet is coming back! I wrenched halfway around. But it was not Harriet. The door was opening slowly, swinging into the room with a faltering, uncertain movement that was not at all like Harriet.

I turned again and looked at the woman. Now the change was definite and amazing. She had moved back a little, and she seemed to have shrunk together, seemed to have drawn that billowing cloak about her and huddled together in a stooped, frightened posture. On her face now was unmistakable terror! She took a step backward, then another.

Then suddenly, straightening, drawing her tall body erect, she changed yet again! A ghastly rage swept across her face. She gave tongue, calling out in a furious, terrible voice of baffled hate, "Gabriel! Gabriel! Ah, wretched man!"

From the darkness behind came a contrasting voice, low and gentle, sibilant and insidiously powerful. "Go, Ulrika. Presently I will come for you."

And in a flash, with a single backward-gliding step, the woman was gone. I turned to face the new danger. The lamp had flared up again at the woman's disappearance. Standing just beyond its light was a tall, thin man dressed in a plain, black suit. I had expected to see a monstrous thing. My overwhelming relief brought a smile to the new visitor's lips.

Once more came his gentle voice. "You must forgive me," he said. "The door was open, and somehow I found my way here. I took advantage of your quiet to steal in upon you. May I introduce myself? I am Gabriel Lantora."

In the now adequate light the figure of Gabriel Lantora, the implacable enemy of Ulrika Bayne, took on shape, and though he continued to stand in the room's outer shadows, we saw that his face bore a kindly expression, though weary. He seemed

still comparatively young, and yet there was gray-black hair at his temples. He was tall, solidly though not heavily built, and dressed plainly in clothes that might have served either for business or travel. Though his appearance was mild and kindly, his vivid eyes flashed fire. So did his words.

"If you know of Ulrika Bayne, you know me," he said. "And she has been disturbing you. I came here to-night for two reasons—one, because I knew you were in danger, and two, because I need your help against her. I have come at a vital time. I seek to strike once and for all, and end the struggle between her whom you have just seen and myself. That makes no sense to you, I know—"

HIS face gleamed in the dusk; his eyes were momentarily far away. "But danger makes sense, danger is real, and you are in danger, as that death *ouanga* she has given you testifies. She has already killed your police commissioner, and will not hesitate to kill again." He shrugged. "For her, you know too much. But you shall not die, because I am here to prevent it."

We no longer troubled to fight against the impossible with reason. The impossible was true.

We accepted what Gabriel Lantora told us.

"But how could she have known?" Monica faltered.

"And who is Ulrika Bayne?" I asked. "And why is she here?"

Lantora shrugged. "Those are not important things. She is a Haitian, as I am, and comes originally from a good family in Port-au-Prince. My father, who was a minister there, denounced Ulrika Bayne from his pulpit one Sunday, after she had been discovered wearing one of the strange haircloth bodices which penitent Voodoo worshippers wear to beg Damballah for forgiveness of nameless sins.

"Well, on the day after he gave his sermon, he received the death warning of the *culte des morts*—together with an anonymous letter asking him

to withdraw his denunciation of Ulrika. Of course, he refused.

"Ulrika disappeared from society. Then stories began to drift down from the hills of a 'white serpent' or the 'white queen' of a secret cult.

"And then"—Lantora paused and his face worked—"both my parents were brutally slain while I was in New Orleans on business—their throats torn out by human hands! Ulrika Bayne had accomplished her revenge.

"My search began. I acquainted myself with the demoniac rites of her devilish cult. Without her knowing, I allied myself with them, I learned all that Ulrika knew, though I bargained my soul to do it. But I do not regret having bargained. With your help I may send Ulrika Bayne's accursed soul to the nethermost cosmos from which it can never return, back to Hell from which it came to-night, but back forever!

"One night I set out alone for the mountains. I met her suddenly on a deeply shadowed trail. Before I could protect myself, she was at my throat. She left me for dead, but I did not die. I returned to Port-au-Prince to pursue my vengeance, surer of myself than ever. I followed her then from Haiti to New Orleans, where I found her and, as you doubtless know, shot her.

"But they did not allow me to burn her body. It was a terrible mistake on their part, but they knew no better and I could not convince them.

"So, Ulrika eluded me a second time. But now she must not escape. She must die, and this time her body must be destroyed by fire. As long as Ulrika Bayne lives, I too must live. Only when she is dead may I find peace. And I want peace more than anything else in the world. I am tired—so tired."

THE force of Lantora's weary but terrible hatred swept over us like a hot wind. Monica sat leaning forward, her lips pressed tightly together, her head raised, as if to catch every word Lantora might say. I opened my lips to thank Lantora

for his intervention, but he broke in before I could speak.

"Do not thank me. We are strangers, and must always remain so. I protect you from the woman I hate because it is a blow struck at her."

"But what can we do?" asked Monica.

"There is a man in Chicago who may be able to help you—this same Bishop Peale of New Orleans, now connected to the staff of Cardinal Sanderson. Go to him tomorrow and mention Ulrika Bayne's name to him. Now I must go to Ulrika."

I remembered abruptly the low, commanding tone he had used in addressing Ulrika Bayne when he had first entered, and its strange effect on her. I remembered her frustrated, bitter cry—"Gabriel! Gabriel! Ah, wretched man!" What power did Lantora hold over that malignant entity from outside?

"Good night," said Lantora, and slipped quietly out the way he had come.

INTO the silence left by his departure came the jangling ring of the doorbell. I answered it. Opening the door, an exclamation escaped me. Two uniformed men stood there. The police!

"Is Monica Crittendon here?" asked one.

There was no need for me to speak; Monica stood behind me.

"I am Monica Crittendon," she said.

"Did you see anyone come out of here?" I broke in excitedly.

They looked at me, puzzled. "No. No one."

Monica's arrest threw into me a desire for immediate action. I sought out Bishop Peale. I roused him out of bed, told him as much as I knew.

He was a kindly old man in his late sixties, his hair graying, his eyes hard and sharp behind pince-nez. He recalled Lantora at once. He also recalled seeing Ulrika fall, fatally wounded. He was much agitated at what I said about the manner of Commissioner Allen's death. But he repeated several times that Ulrika

Bayne was dead. Nevertheless each time his voice was a little less certain. He said he couldn't understand why Lantora had sent me to him, unless it was to gain some additional knowledge of Voodooism.

"Damballah, the serpent god, demands blood and ghostly sacrifice," he said, speaking of the *culte des morts*. "There are a great many curious beliefs connected with cults like these. The animation of corpses is a phase of the ritual of the *culte des morts*, and the existence of an astral entity apart from the psychological self is also firmly believed in.

"In my own experience in New Orleans I have come up against more than one inexplicable and disturbing evidence of supernatural power. We are forced inevitably to a definite conclusion—there are two realms beyond this life, the good and the evil, each represented by its forces, forces still at war. Yes, the powers of the *culte des morts* are real and difficult to fight. If I can help, though I don't see how, I'll be more than willing."

The whirr of the telephone bell interrupted him. He took up the instrument, spoke, handed it to me. "For you."

"Hello, Carter?" I recognized Lantora's low voice at once. "A Captain Smithson, aide to Commissioner Allen, who had a good deal of information thought known to Allen alone, promised the papers a statement for the morning edition. He never got the chance. He was found dead in the hall between his office and the conference room. His throat had been torn out, and a woman, cloaked in black, was seen by three witnesses and described as *floating* down the stairs immediately after the murder. Ask Bishop Peale to stand by, and I shall want to see you at your home tonight. Matters will come to a head soon."

I replaced the telephone before remembering that Lantora knew nothing of Monica's arrest. I wanted him to know; so I asked Bishop Peale to trace the call. The bishop pushed a bell on his table and almost

at once his secretary came into the room from an adjoining one.

"Will you trace the telephone call that was just put through to me?"

For a moment the secretary hesitated in surprise. Then he said, "There has been no call put through for the last hour!"

The bishop smiled and said, "Someone has made a mistake."

I remembered the lights dimming before Ulrika Bayne's presence. Did Gabriel possess a similar, or perhaps even greater, power—over electrical devices, in this case the telephone—so that he had managed, by some remote and mystical control, to get through to the Bishop's own phone without the necessity of a relay from the secretary?

CHAPTER III

Kidnaped!

AN HOUR later, as dawn was breaking, I hurried to the police station where Monica Crittendon was being detained. As I hastened, Lantora's strange words kept coming back: "I shot her at last. I wanted them to burn her body. They refused. That was a terrible mistake."

He had shot her in the presence of twenty-odd people, and yet she was not dead. Could it be that the improbable thing mentioned in the official accounts from New Orleans was the truth?

I recalled the words: "There is also a strong belief current among the Negroes that it is impossible ever to kill any member of the sect, for they have weird rites which they employ to raise the bodies from the dead. But these bodies, Lantora claimed, were never fully alive, being used only as stations for the astral to return to—" Could it be, then, that Ulrika Bayne was dead, and yet terribly, maddeningly alive?

I saw Monica as soon as I entered the station. She was dressed to leave, and came up to me at once. "I've

been released," she said. "Two clerks at the office saw the commissioner alive at his desk as I was drawing the door shut behind me when I left his office just before his death. Besides, Smithson's murder, of which you know by this time, rather lets me out, since I was safely locked up when it happened."

That was that. I took Monica home with me. Harriet took charge of her, put her to bed.

It was eight o'clock when I went to the library. A few minutes later Takati, my general factotum who had the previous night off, ushered in Lantora. He entered quickly with an abrupt greeting and dropped into a chair, beginning to talk at once.

"Much has happened," he said. "I have tracked Ulrika to her hiding place!"

I came to my feet.

"Be calm," he said, though he himself was not calm. "Yes, I have found her. I have discovered the *houmfort*, the Mystery Temple where she presides over the Voodoo ritual and holds her meetings with those whom she has enlisted in her hellish cult of death. She is in a building on Wabash Avenue, in a squalid Negro district."

"How did you find her?"

"That does not matter," he replied. "What is important is that we must go there quickly. Certainly I must go, and you must come with me. I have been trying in vain to discover the burial place of Ulrika Bayne's body. I think that it is here in Chicago. She has had it brought from New Orleans, so that she could rest more easily in the neighborhood of her activities."

He was speaking calmly, precisely, dispassionately, as though the amazing information he was imparting was of the stuff of ordinary conversation, something of everyday interest. But its effect on me was not calming.

"Surely we can do nothing until we know where her body lies?" I cried.

"That is why we must go to the *houmfort*! We must face Ulrika.

We must force her to tell us where her body is buried. We can delay no longer. Are you going with me, or not?"

I thought of Monica, hesitated, and in that moment my question was answered for me. A woman's piercing scream split the silence of the house. It was repeated, a chilling cry of terror, from upstairs, from the rooms where Monica and Harriet were!

"Monica!" I shouted. "Harriet!"

I sped from the room and pounded up the stairs. Silence had fallen, silence more frightening than the screams of a moment ago. I ran down the upper hall. I threw one door open, that of the guest room; the room was empty, the bed undisturbed. Then I flung myself across the hall, upon the door of Harriet's room. It opened under the weight of my body and I went sprawling into the room.

Harriet lay on the floor before me. A hasty examination convinced me that though her hair was disheveled and her clothing disarranged, she herself was unhurt, and was recovering from her faint even as I bent anxiously above her. But there was no sign of Monica in the room.

She was gone! The wind-swung curtains from the open window over the veranda roof gave mute evidence of the road that had been taken.

"Monica," Harriet murmured. "They took her."

"Who was it?" I demanded, furious with myself for letting Monica alone even for a moment.

"A woman, and two Negroes."

"Lantora!" I called.

He was standing in the doorway. "Monica's gone. They've taken her—Ulrika and her Negroes," I said rapidly. "For God's sake, man, help me find her!"

He nodded abruptly, said, "Come quickly then," and went rapidly from the room.

In a moment we were running across the lawn toward my car, still standing on the drive where I had left it.

Behind us, Takati appeared sud-

denly in the doorway, calling, "Mr. Henry, Mr. Henry!"

I turned impatiently. Even at that moment Monica might be dead—her white throat torn—ghastly thought! "No time now, Takati," I flung back.

"The telephone," he shouted.

I paused. Perhaps Monica might already have escaped them? Vain hope! "Who is it?"

"A man named Peale."

"Ask him to call in two hours."

Then another thought came to me. "What's that address?" I asked, turning to Lantora.

"4777 South Wabash."

"Tell him to meet me at 4777 South Wabash! Tell him there's no time to lose!"

Driving more intently, more furiously, with greater purpose than I had ever driven before, I made my way into the city, across it, and into the most squalid section of Chicago's south side. The dark streets, dirty and narrow, were lit only by occasional dim lamps that seemed to lean perilously out into the road on their posts.

Lantora seized my arm. "Slow down and take the next corner to the right."

The machine lurched into a side street, going more slowly now.

"At the end of the block."

Obediently I drove forward and drew toward the curb when Lantora spoke again. "Not here. Turn the corner again, left, and park the car in the alley."

I did as he directed and we found ourselves in a narrow, filthy little alley behind a group of rotting sheds and buildings.

"So," said Lantora, getting out of the car. "Come now."

WE made our way through evil-smelling passages, through dark little courts lined by squalid and odorous shacks, until we came at last to a door half-hidden in the darkness. There was no one near, no one in sight.

"Step aside," whispered Lantora.

I did as he ordered, crouching in the shadows that haunted the door-

way. Lantora knocked, three times, paused, then once again. The door creaked a little, opened a tiny way.

"Who?" asked a deep, muffled voice.

Lantora said something that sounded like Chinese—evidently the password to the place. The door swung back. The man in the dark corridor beyond shuffled aside, grunting something in dialect.

CHAPTER IV

Blood Sacrifice

LANTORA went ahead and I followed. The door closed behind us and the keeper came forward. At that moment Lantora lunged back and something struck the doorkeeper's head with a dull crunching thud. I felt his bulky form sagging forward. Lantora caught it easily, lowering it gently to the floor. Then he rolled the body over to one wall. Astral or human, Lantora had not forgotten his police technique.

From some distant place in the building came the steady rhythmic beating of drums—*boom, boom, boom*—over and over—and above it, under it, running through it—the eerie chanting of human voices in chorus.

"That will lead us," Lantora whispered. "Come."

Although we were in darkness, Lantora seemed to know precisely where he was going; it was as if he had often made his way in the devilous passages that honeycombed the cellars of this deserted building.

The sound of the drums and of the chanting voices grew louder. Abruptly we came to a steep flight of stairs. We went deep into the earth. The air became dank. Suddenly we emerged into a dimly lit corridor, both ends of which were lost in darkness.

But Lantora never paused. I kept my hand on his shoulder. The end of the corridor toward which we were moving came at last out of the

darkness, and I saw a heavy black curtain suspended across the passageway. From beneath it came a very faint line of light, reflected, it seemed, from very far beyond the curtain.

I knew, with a sharp thrill, that we were on the threshold of the meeting chamber of the *culte des morts*. We were about to enter the holy of holies of Voodoo worship. The rhythmic beating of the drums had reached a loud and steady boom; the voices of the chanters had risen to a high frenzy. The ritual of the Serpent-God Damballah was in full sway.

Lantora pulled the curtain slightly to one side, and I looked furtively into the room beyond. It was an underground cavern, bare of furnishings except for a long table at the farther end; this evidently served as a sort of altar, for it was covered by a heavy red cloth, on which lay what appeared to be a human skull, together with three large copper bowls, gleaming in the flickering of tall black tapers that stood on the floor around the table.

The tapers provided the only light in the underground meeting chamber. Directly behind the altar stood a mock cross, painted in black and red and tufted with feathers. Around this cross, painted in black and red also, was wreathed a wooden snake, its head rearing up at the top, its glassy eyes shining with striking realism in the dim light.

The cavern walls were hung in red cloth on which were painted great black figures, one of which was clearly a copy of the death *ouanga* now so familiar to me. There were also innumerable reptiles drawn on the cloth, and one huge half-reptile, half-man, which was evidently a primitive artist's crude conception of the god Damballah.

The huge, weirdly decorated cavern was filled with humans. Huddled on the floor, crowded down toward the makeshift altar, were Negroes. Some were on their knees, some squatting. All were chanting, their faces turned toward the *mama-*

loi—Ulrika Bayne, the woman we sought!

She stood before that frenzied crowd, clothed only in a blood-red cloth draped over one shoulder and down across her body, swaying to the chant that arose, magnificent and terrible, her eyes like black fire, her mouth a startling crimson, half open in song. Beyond her, in the darkness, crouched three drummers. The chant was, surprisingly, in English.

Damballah, Ouede, Damballah,
The hour has come for blood.
The hour for sacrifice has come.
Damballah, Ouede, Damballah.

Ulrika suddenly moved backward and cast several rapid glances over her shoulder, as if to assure herself of someone's presence. Abruptly, with a sharp upward gesture, she stopped the chanting, the queer song dying on the lips of the singers as if by magic. All the faces in the cavern were turned to her with a peculiar rapture and intensity.

Ulrika turned slowly, made a sign to someone beyond the curtains hung behind the altar. Two Negroes appeared, dragging between them a terror-stricken goat, whose frantic bleatings sounded unnaturally loud in the sudden stillness that had fallen upon the worshipers. The goat was brought to where Ulrika stood majestically erect.

She took hold of the animal as the Negroes released it. She managed,

despite its frenetic struggles, to hold the animal with one hand, while with the other she signed for the throng to take up the chant again. Once more the drums began to beat, the Negroes to sing. But now the rhythm was changed—it was faster, madder, and the words were no longer distinguishable.

Ulrika came slowly to her knees, releasing the goat, which now made no effort to move, and faced the animal, whose great wide eyes were fixed upon her own in pitiful fright. Then abruptly she reached to one side, took up a gleaming knife, and plunged it deeply into the animal's throat.

The Negroes beyond the altar at once ran forward with bowls, one of which she took impatiently from them and held to catch the blood which gushed from the wound. The bowl filled quickly, and she took a second from the Negroes. A third was partially filled before the blood ceased flowing and the goat was allowed to fall in death.

The voices of the worshipers had now risen to screaming intensity. The *mamaloï* joined in the song, screaming as loudly as those who crouched before the altar, so that her voice reached us distinctly. She emptied the bowl of blood on the cross in a single, sweeping gesture. Quickly taking up the second bowl, she passed it down to the kneeling

[Turn Page]

A Cold ?



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audience, who began to drink of the still warm blood.

The blood maddened them. They dipped their hands into it, smeared it over each other and upon their own bodies. The chanting, meanwhile, never lessened.

But at last, as we watched with fascinated horror, it died down to a soft moaning song. The Negroes looked eagerly toward the swaying figure of Ulrika Bayne. It was apparent that they were waiting for something more, and it was then that Ulrika motioned a second time to someone behind the curtains beyond the altar.

Lantora bent toward me, murmuring, "Whatever you see, don't stir. Wait until I move."

It was fortunate that he warned me, for when the curtains near the altar were thrust aside, I felt as though death itself had come up in my throat. Monica, white and drawn, was pushed forward into the small space between curtains and altar. Ulrika Bayne leaned forward, leering. Lantora's fingers gripped my biceps, re-inforced his warning.

Very slowly Monica came forward. She was beautiful as she moved in the half-light, her white face making her eyes dark pools, her body erect, her tight mouth red as Ulrika's. But she moved as if under a kind of hypnosis—stiffly, uncertainly—toward the altar—and the knife!

Then the music began again—the slow beating of drums, the chanting of the worshipers, this time in a lower key and with different words—words fraught with horror!

Damballah, Ouede
Blood-Lover, Damballah,
We have the Sacrifice,
She stands before us
Ready for the knife.
Damballah, Ouede, Damballah,
Look down upon us
And drink the blood
Soon to flow.

The subdued intensity of their words was not lost to us. There was a horrific suggestion of terrible waiting, waiting—and beneath, a dormant triumph ready to burst out at the

sacrifice—the awful sacrifice that Lantora must prevent. I felt myself grow rigid with anger and impotence.

Still Lantora's fingers, mute but eloquent, kept me where I was. In my inaction I died a thousand deaths—but Lantora held me, not by physical force, but by the strength that had been in his warning to make no move until he gave the sign.

Monica stood facing Ulrika.

Swiftly Ulrika bent forward. I felt Lantora's hand on my mouth, stifling my involuntary cry. But Ulrika had merely given a verbal command. Monica slowly raised her head, exposing her white throat.

Then Ulrika bent for the knife, which she had dropped after the sacrifice of the goat. She stepped close to Monica. I turned a frantic face to Lantora.

Abruptly he pushed past me, thrust the curtains aside, strode forward into the room!

"Ulrika Bayne!" he intoned in a loud commanding voice.

A dead silence fell upon the worshipers. Ulrika turned slowly, uncertainly. As Monica had bent before Ulrika Bayne's will only a moment before, so now she seemed to be bending before the will reflected in Lantora's voice. Then she saw as well as heard him!

"Gabriel!" she screamed in a kind of animal anguish, and her knife clattered to the floor.

Lantora launched himself forward.

CHAPTER V

The Duel of the Astrals

PANIC broke among the Negroes. Believing without a moment's doubt that police had discovered their secret place of worship they rose with frightened shouts. Some rushed for the door to the outside. The rest, still under the influence of their demoniac ritual, still half-crazed from the blood sacrifice that

had been made to Damballah and the human sacrifice that had been about to take place, became like stampeding cattle locking horns in a terror-stricken attempt to escape out of a cul-de-sac. Like western horsemen, we drove our way through, the solid banks of flesh melting and flowing away on either side of us.

Monica, dear girl, saw me, recognized me. Lantora's command had released her from Ulrika's spell, and she came running from the blood-stained altar across the room to me. Behind her Ulrika Bayne stood, her eyes fixed upon Lantora, closing in upon her.

Monica fell into my arms, sobbing her relief. Over her shoulder I saw Ulrika Bayne, the *mamaloï*, facing Lantora, her face ashen, her eyes burning with malefic hate, yet frustrated and powerless. She beheld in Lantora her bitterest enemy, the only person who could do her fatal injury, and she could do nothing. Held by a spell more powerful than her own, her jaws were set, her face contorted by a terrific straining of her will. And then, jerking her head suddenly up, she freed herself from the spell!

She swung around with lightning-like rapidity, picked up the knife she had dropped in her first terror. I was about to let Monica go, to dash to Lantora's aid. Would he fail now? After all his patience, all his striving? But in Lantora's face was neither dismay nor fear. His lips were set in a grim smile. I knew that the spirit within that solidly built body was cold and calm.

Suddenly, with a shriek, Ulrika Bayne flung herself away from Lantora and ran toward the doorway through which we had entered.

Lantora turned leisurely, with maddening slowness, watching her. Then he called again. "Ulrika—stop!"

Ulrika stumbled, hesitated in her flight, half-turned. She strove visibly to move forward. She could not. She was rooted to the spot and could turn only to face Lantora once more.

"Not yet, Ulrika," said Gabriel

Lantora, his voice softer now, more insinuating, yet with a whiplash quality.

SHE strove with all her will against Lantora, her body writhing in impotent anger and despair, but she could not move. The last of the Negroes was gone now, and the sound of their swiftly running feet drifted down to us from above. Otherwise stillness reigned. Ulrika flung her body from side to side, eager to escape, yet knowing she could not.

Lantora spoke again, this time in a low, sibilant, compelling voice. "No, Ulrika, escape is not for you. Not until I have done with you at last. And then there will be no far place for you to go."

"Gabriel!" she screamed. "Unite with me! We shall rule, you and I!"

Lantora smiled, but in his smile there was terrible hatred, indomitable will. Then for the first time he laughed, his laughter slashing at the woman.

"Wretched man!" she cried out. "Wretched man—may Damballah strike you dead!"

I knew at last what I was seeing in this unholy temple of dark mysteries—a duel of hate-fraught wills—Ulrika Bayne and Gabriel Lantora—enemies in Life and Death and beyond Death, enemies in the infinite reaches of the spirit, now acting out their demoniac battle in this blood-bathed cave below deserted and squalid Chicago streets!

Suddenly I swung around, tense, my fists clenched, ready to lash out.

Bishop Peale stood there, dressed soberly in a dark traveling suit. Behind him, in the shadows, stood his chauffeur and Takati.

"Good evening, Carter," he said jerkily, an undercurrent of suppressed excitement in his voice. "I thought I might be of use, and besides, have discovered something. I came on here, and your Japanese was helpful in finding you." He looked inquiringly beyond, his face paling suddenly at sight of Ulrika Bayne.

"Lantora is forcing her to tell where her body is hidden," I whispered.

Lantora had taken a slow step forward. Bishop Peale shuddered. "This is unholy, evil," he whispered.

Lantora began to speak, his tones softly sinister. "Come forward, Ulrika. Come to me."

She was powerless to ignore, helpless to fight.

She writhed before him, struggled against his will, but was drawn inexorably toward him. "Gabriel, Gabriel!" she gasped.

"Come, Ulrika," he almost whispered. He extended his arms, went slowly to meet her as she came to meet him. And the woman who was dead yet terribly alive, the woman whose power was absolute except for that of Gabriel Lantora, cringed before him, sinking to the ground. She knelt, her eyes wide with fear. She crouched lower as he bent above her. She slid to the floor with a sobbing cry, her body outstretched before Lantora, her hands touching his feet in an agony of terrible fear. "Gabriel, Gabriel, Gabriel—" she moaned, shuddering.

"Rise, Ulrika," commanded Lantora.

She moaned, but did not move.

HIS voice grew more firm. "Rise, Ulrika."

Still the woman did not move. She began to whimper, her voice like a child's crying. Then she cried out, "No, no, no, Gabriel— I cannot."

Lantora bent low over the woman, speaking very slowly, firmly. "Rise, Ulrika Bayne, and face me. Look into my eyes. You know Lantora. He loved you once, but he hates you now. Rise. Face me."

Monica gripped my arm convulsively at this revelation that Lantora had once loved the woman who now groveled before him. Bishop Peale was watching, his face drained of blood.

Then, with a snake-like grace, Ulrika lifted her head and shoulders from the floor, lifted her body on her hands. The red robe which she

wore slipped from her body, and her flesh gleamed with a deathly pallor in the flickering glow of the fast dying candlelight from around the altar.

"Rise!" demanded Lantora again.

She came slowly to her knees.

"Look into my eyes!"

Her head moved upward almost visibly against her will, and she looked into the face of her tormentor. Then her eyes flashed once more in defiance and hatred, her mouth opened, and her lips twisted as if to speak—but no sound came.

"Up," ordered Lantora grimly.

She came to her feet with a writhing motion, leaning against the altar, bending away from him. Abject fear again came into her face. We could see Lantora's face only in profile now, but the stern line of his set jaw, the locked expression of his face, showed the intensity with which he fought against the thing before him.

And now his voice became terrible.

"Ulrika, where have you hidden your body?"

Ulrika Bayne did not reply. She was leaning as far back from Lantora as possible, her back arched across the makeshift altar, braced by her back-flung arms. Her face was twisted by despair and furious hatred,

"Ulrika, where have you hidden your body?"

"Gabriel, Gabriel—" It was the wail of a lost soul, echoing in the tense silence.

"You have taken it from New Orleans," Lantora went on, lowering his face toward her. "Where have you put it?"

Like a serpent rearing, Ulrika stood erect. Her face was thrust near to Lantora's, and it was vile in its white loathing and malevolence. "No, Gabriel. That I shall never tell. Never." She broke into horrible, jarring laughter that sent shudders through Monica and me.

Lantora spoke again, no longer in English—a torrent of words rushed from his lips. Their effect on Ulrika was instantaneous. She shuddered violently, swayed, crumpled sound-

lessly to the floor. She lay sprawled at Lantora's feet, crushed and beaten, long shuddering sobs racking her body.

"Where, Ulrika?" he asked, bending over her.

"In a graveyard near Hubbard's Woods." Ulrika's voice came chokingly, muffled.

"Its name, Ulrika?"

"Gatewood's Cemetery."

"How do we get there?"

"I don't know. I never go by the road."

Behind me, the bishop came suddenly to life. "I know, Lantora," he called in an unsteady voice. "The Lake road—north."

LANTORA looked up, for the first time aware of Bishop Peale's presence. His lips twisted into a sardonic smile, but his eyes flashed a welcome. "Go quickly, all of you. Ulrika and I will be there when you arrive. We must finish the work Bishop Peale prevented in New Orleans!"

We drove at breakneck speed to Hubbard's Woods, the five of us—Bishop Peale, his chauffeur, Takati, Monica and I—and then to the cemetery, an old, abandoned graveyard on a side road, marked by a crumbling stone wall, half overgrown with shrubbery and tall, uncut grass, with close-pressing trees lending an eerie atmosphere to its desertion, its white slabs gleaming through the open gateway in the pale moonlight.

There was no one at the gate. Could something have happened to Lantora and Ulrika Bayne? But no—there they were suddenly, Lantora and the cowering woman, clothed again in her red robe, standing not far from the gate, waiting beside a grave that had no marker. There were two spades lying significantly on the grave.

I shuddered as I saw the *mamaloï's* blanched face in the moonlight and the demoniac glow that face shed forth. Monica, who had insisted upon coming with us rather than wait in the car, trembled and looked away.

"Let the grave be opened at once," said Lantora, stepping to one side.

Takati and the bishop's chauffeur got to work immediately. The grave was fortunately a very shallow one, not two feet deep, and the coffin had obviously been placed near the surface in case it became necessary to move it at short notice. In a few minutes the earth had been cleared away. The bishop and I stepped forward to help lift the coffin. There it stood at last, its silver ornaments so dulled with age that there was no gleam in the moonlight. It was, I saw with satisfaction, of rather plain wood, and stood, a dark, dirt-covered mass, on the ground.

"Perhaps those two had better go now," suggested Lantora of the bishop's chauffeur and Takati, whom we sent immediately to drive the car down the road and wait for us there.

Ulrika Bayne moved restlessly in the shadows, seeming to merge with them, her hands blindly flailing the air. She was inescapably trapped and knew it. Lantora called next for brushwood and dry grass. We gathered it. There came a sudden quick movement from the *mamaloï's* shadowy being. I saw it and shouted a warning. But I was too late. Ulrika Bayne's hands were at Lantora's throat. A picture of Commissioner Allen, as he must have looked in his office after his murder, flashed through my mind—a horrific picture of the man with his throat torn out. I stumbled forward.

But my fright was needless. Lantora calmly flung Ulrika from him, holding her in his grip. "Poor Ulrika," he murmured. "Have you not yet learned that you can injure me no more?"

He turned to me. "Give me the match, or your cigarette lighter. It must be my hand that does this destroying act."

He struck a match on the box I extended, and touched it to the dried grass around the coffin. A blue flame sprang up, wavered uncertainly in the wind, and flared. Ulrika shrieked as if she had been stabbed. "Gabriel!" she cried in a piercing voice.

At a motion from Lantora, the three of us backed away. The flames grew and spread greedily. Fanned by the wind they leaped up, encircled the coffin, and a weird reflection fell on the faces of Lantora and Ulrika Bayne.

Behind me Bishop Peale was murmuring a prayer.

Ulrika began to flutter about the fire. She ran in little circles around the burning pile, calling out in a terrible voice, wringing her pale hands. As she ran, the red robe dropped from her.

Suddenly she stopped. Above the crackling of the flames came a rhythmic beating of drums, sounding from a distance at first, then slowly growing louder and stronger, the same rhythm we had heard in the *houm-fort* on South Wabash Avenue, the sound that sprang from the terror-shrouded hills of Haiti. *Boom—boom—boom*—the sound rang out into the night, wavering in the wind, trembling, growing. As the flames spread, the sound came louder, and presently there was a terrific booming of tom-toms in our ears. And then came the chanting—a wailing chorus that grew in the night above the sound of the drums.

As the beating of the tom-toms grew in strength, as the wailing chant swelled into the night, so, too, did Ulrika Bayne's cries mount in power. We were seeing, hearing the impossible, yet it was true! Those flames, consuming the coffin and the

body in it, were also consuming Ulrika Bayne's fragmentary mortality.

Abruptly she ceased her wailing.

For a moment she stood rooted, then slowly she advanced to the edge of the pyre, and on into the flames. She wavered, turned and gave one look back at Lantora, the man who had once loved her. Then she seemed to be drawn down into the now almost consumed body—and a tired wail came drifting up into the silent night.

Lantora's shoulders sagged. "She is dead," he said softly. "I am avenged and may rest. Good-by. Forget all that has passed."

He drew back into the shadowy trees, faded into the night.

"Lantora!" I called.

But Lantora was gone.

I felt a hand on my arm. It was Bishop Peale.

"I told you," he said, in a voice that shook, "that I had discovered something. I cabled Haiti about Lantora. I got my answer. Lantora was killed by Ulrika Bayne on a deserted mountain pass almost twenty-five years ago, but he had already gained the secrets she was to use after her body's death in New Orleans. Therein lay his power. May both of them rest in peace. He told us to forget. Let us try."

The dying flames crackled and sputtered, and Monica, trembling at my side, pointed the way to forgetting.

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Upon Earth by Michael
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By
KEITH HAMMOND

*Author of "The Seventh Coffin," "The
Hand of Ahrimam," etc.*

*"It may turn out after all that the weav-
ers of fantasy are the veritable realists."
—Machen.*

"O H—it's you," said Hay-
ward. "You got my wire?"
The light from the
doorway of the cottage outlined his
tall, lean figure, making his shadow
a long, black blotch on the narrow
bar of radiance that shone across the
sand to where green-black rollers
were surging.

A sea-bird gave a shrill, cerie cry
from the darkness, and I saw Hay-
ward's silhouette give a curious little
jerk.

"Come in," he said quickly, step-
ping back.



The invaders squirmed about us

Mason and I followed him into the cottage.

Michael Hayward was a writer—a unique one. Very few writers could create the strange atmosphere of eldritch horror that Hayward put into his fantastic tales of mystery. He had imitators—all great writers have—but none attained the stark and dreadful illusion of reality with which he invested his oftentime shocking fantasies. He went far beyond the bounds of human experience and familiar superstition, delving into uncanny fields of unearthliness. Blackwood's vampiric elements, M. R. James' loathsome liches—even the black horror of de Maupassant's *Horla* and Bierce's *Damned Thing*—paled by comparison.

It wasn't the abnormal beings Hayward wrote about so much as the masterly impression of reality he managed to create in the reader's mind—the ghastly idea that he wasn't writing fiction, but was simply transcribing on paper the stark, hellish truth. It was no wonder that the jaded public avidly welcomed each new story he wrote.

Bill Mason had telephoned me that afternoon at the *Journal*, where I worked, and had read me an urgent telegram from Hayward asking—in fact, begging us—to come at once to his isolated cottage on the beach north of Santa Barbara. Now, beholding him, I wondered at the urgency.

He didn't seem ill, although his thin face was more gaunt than usual, and his eyes unnaturally bright. There was a nervous tension in his manner, and I got the odd impression that he was intently listening, alert for some sound from outside the cottage. As he took our coats and motioned us to chairs, Mason gave me a worried glance.

Something was wrong. Mason sensed it, I sensed it. Hayward filled his pipe and lit it, the smoke wreathing about his stiff black hair. There were bluish shadows in his temples.

"What's up, old man?" I hazarded. "We couldn't make head nor tail of your wire."

He flushed. "I guess I was a little flurried when I wrote it. You see, Gene—oh, what's the use—something is wrong, very wrong. At first I thought it might be my nerves, but—it isn't."

FROM outside the cottage came the shrill cry of a gull, and Hayward turned his face to the window. His eyes were staring, and I saw him repress a shudder. Then he seemed to pull himself together. He faced us, his lips compressed.

"Tell me, Gene—and you, Bill—did you notice anything—odd—on your way up?"

"Why, no," I said.

"Nothing? Are you sure? It might have seemed unimportant—any sounds, I mean."

"There were the seagulls," Mason said, frowning. "You remember, I mentioned them to you, Gene."

Hayward caught him up sharply. "Seagulls?"

"Yes," I said. "That is, birds of some kind—they didn't sound quite like seagulls. We couldn't see them, but they kept following the car, calling to each other. We could hear them. But aside from the birds—"

I hesitated, astonished at the look on Hayward's face—an expression almost of despair. He said, "No—that's it, Gene. But they weren't birds. They're something—you won't believe," he whispered, and there was fright in his eyes. "Not till you see them—and then it'll be too late."

"Mike," I said. "You've been overworking. You've—"

"No," he interrupted. "I'm not losing my grip. Those weird stories of mine—they haven't driven me mad, if that's what you're thinking. I'm as sane as you are. The truth is," he said very slowly, choosing his words with care, "I am being attacked."

I groaned inwardly. Delusions of persecution—a symptom of insanity. Was Hayward's mind really crumbling? Why, I wondered, were his eyes so unnaturally bright, and his thin face so flushed? And why did he keep shooting quick, furtive glances at the window?

I turned to the window. I started to say something and stopped.

I was looking at a vine. That is, it resembled a thick, fleshy vine more than anything else, but I had never seen any plant quite similar to the rope-like thing that lay along the window-ledge. I opened the window to get a better look at it.

IT WAS as thick as my forearm, and very pale—yellowish ivory. It possessed a curious glossy texture that made it seem semi-transparent, and it ended in a raw-looking stump that was overgrown with stiff, hair-like cilia. The tip somehow made me think of the extremity of an elephant's trunk, although there was no real similarity. The other end dangled from the window-ledge and disappeared in the darkness toward the front of the house. And, somehow, I didn't like the look of the thing.

"What is it?" Mason asked behind me.

I picked up the—the—whatever it was. Then I got a severe shock, for it began to slip through my hand! It was being pulled away from me, and as I stared the end slipped through my fingers and whipped into the darkness. I craned out the window.

"There's somebody outside!" I flung over my shoulder. "I saw—"

I felt a hand seize me, shove me aside. "Shut that window," Hayward gasped. He slammed it down, locked it. And I heard a gasping, inarticulate cry from Mason.

He was standing in the open doorway, glaring out. His face was changing, becoming transfigured with amazement and loathing. From outside the portal came a shrill, mewing cry—and a blast of great winds. Sand swirled in through the doorway. I saw Mason stagger back, his arm flung up before his eyes.

Hayward leaped for the door, slammed it. I helped the now shuddering Mason to a chair. It was terrible to see this usually imperturbable man in the grip of what could only be called panic. He dropped into the seat, glaring up at me with distended eyes. I gave him my flask;

his fingers were white as they gripped it. He took a hasty gulp. His breathing was rapid and uneven.

Hayward came up beside me, stood looking down at Mason, pity in his face.

"What the devil's the matter?" I cried. But Mason ignored me, had eyes only for Hayward.

"G-God in heaven," he whispered. "Have I—gone mad, Hayward?"

Hayward shook his head slowly. "I've seen them, too."

"Bill," I said sharply. "What's out there? What did you see?"

He only shook his head violently, trying to repress the violent paroxysms of trembling that were shaking him.

I swung about, went to the door, opened it. I don't know what I expected to see—some animal, perhaps—a mountain-lion or even a huge snake of some kind. But there was nothing there—just the empty white beach.

It was true there was a disk-shaped area of disturbed sand nearby, but I could make nothing of that. I heard Hayward shouting at me to close the door.

I shut it. "There's nothing there," I said.

"It—must have gone," Mason managed to get out. "Give me another drink, will you?"

I handed him my flask. Hayward was fumbling in his desk. "Look here," he said after a moment, coming back with a scrap of yellow paper. He thrust it at Mason, and Bill gasped out something incoherent. "That's it," he said, getting his voice under control. "That's the—the thing I saw!"

I peered over his shoulder, scrutinizing the paper. It bore a sketch, in pencil, of something that looked as if it had emerged from a naturalist's nightmare. At first glance I got the impression of a globe, oddly flattened at the top and bottom, and covered with what I thought at first was a sparse growth of very long and thick hairs. Then I saw that they were appendages, slender tentacles. On the rugose upper surface of the thing was a great faceted eye,

and below this a puckered orifice that corresponded, perhaps, to a mouth. Sketched hastily by Hayward, who was not an artist, it was nevertheless powerfully evocative of the hideous.

"That's the thing," Mason said. "Put it away! It was all—shining, though. And it made that—that sound."

"Where did it go?" Hayward asked.

"I—don't know. It didn't roll away—or go into the ocean. I'm sure of that. All I heard was that blast of wind, and sand blew in my eyes. Then—well, it was gone."

I SHIVERED.

"It's cold," Hayward said, watching me. "It always gets cold when they come." Silently he began to kindle a fire in the stone fireplace.

"But such things can't exist!" Mason cried out in sudden protest. Then in tones of despair: "But I saw it, I saw it!"

"Get hold of yourself, Bill," I snapped.

"I don't give a damn what you think, Gene," he cried. "I saw something out there that—why, I've always laughed at such things—legends, dreams—but, God! when one sees it—oh, I'm not trying to fool you, Gene. You'll probably see the thing yourself before long." He finished with a curious note of horror in his voice.

I knew he wasn't lying. Still—"Are you sure it wasn't a—a mirage?" I asked. "The spray, perhaps—an optical illusion?"

Hayward broke in. "No, Gene." He faced us, grim lines bracketing his mouth. "It's no illusion. It's the stark, hideous truth. Even now I sometimes try to make myself believe I'm dreaming some fantastic, incredible nightmare from which I'll eventually awaken. But no. I—I couldn't stand it any longer—alone. The things have been here for two days now. There are several of them—five or six, perhaps more. That's why I sent you the wire."

"Five or six of what?" I demanded, but Mason interrupted me

quickly. "Can't we get out? My car is down the road a bit."

"Don't you think I've tried?" Hayward cried. "I'm afraid to. I've my car too. As a matter of fact, I did start for Santa Barbara last night. I thought I might get away under cover of dark. But the noises—those sounds they make—got louder and louder, and I had the feeling, somehow, that they were getting ready to drop on me. I flagged a man and paid him to send you the wire."

"But what are they?" Mason burst out. "Have you no idea? Such things don't just appear. Some hybrid form of life from the sea, perhaps—some unknown form of life—"

Hayward nodded. "Exactly. An unknown form of life. But one totally alien, foreign to mankind. Not from the sea, Bill, not from the sea. From another dimension—another plane of existence."

This was too much for me. "Oh, come, Hayward," I said. "You can't really mean—why, it's against all logic."

"You didn't see it," Mason said, glaring at me. "If you'd seen that frightful, obscene thing, as I did—"

"Look here," cut in Hayward abruptly. "I—I shouldn't have brought you into this. Seeing what it's done to Bill has made me realize—you're still free to go, you know. Perhaps it would be better—"

I shook my head. I wasn't going to run from a cry in the night, an odd-looking vine, an optical illusion. Besides, I knew what an effort it had cost Hayward to get out those words of renunciation. But before I could speak, a strange, shrill cry came from outside the house. Hayward glanced quickly at the window. He had pulled the shade down.

His face was grave. "I've changed my mind," he said. "You mustn't leave the house tonight. Tomorrow, perhaps—"

He turned to his desk, picked up a small pill-box. Mutely he extended his hand, on which he had dropped a few round, blackish pellets.

I picked one up, sniffed at it curiously. It had a pungent, unfam-

miliar odor. I felt an odd tickling sensation in my nostrils, and suddenly, for no apparent reason, thought of a childhood incident long buried in the past—nothing important, merely a clandestine visit to an apple orchard with two youthful chums. We had filled two gunny-sacks—

WHY should I remember this now? I had entirely forgotten that boyhood adventure—at least, I hadn't thought of it in years.

Hayward took the pellet from me rather hastily, watching my face. "That was the beginning," he said after a pause. "It's a drug. Yes," he went on at our startled expressions. "I've been taking it. Oh, it's not hashish or opium—I wish it were! It's far worse—I got the formula from Ludvig Prinn's *De Vermis Mysteriis*."

"What?" I was startled. "Where did you—"

Hayward coughed. "As a matter of fact, Gene, I had to resort to a little bribery. The book's kept in a vault in the Huntington Library, you know, but I—I managed to get photostatic copies of the pages I needed."

"What's it all about, this book?" Mason asked, impatiently.

"*Mysteries of the Worm*," I told him. "I've seen it mentioned in dispatches at the paper. It's one of the tabooed references—we've got orders to delete it from any story in which it appears."

"Such things are kept hushed up," Hayward said. "Scarcely anyone in California knows that such a book exists in the Huntington Library. Books like that aren't for general knowledge. You see, the man who wrote it was supposed to be an old Flemish sorcerer, who had learned forbidden lore and evil magic—and who wrote the book while he was in prison awaiting trial for witchcraft. The volume's been suppressed by the authorities in every country in which it's been issued. In it I found the formula for this drug."

He rattled the pellets in his hand. "It's—I may as well tell you—it's the source of my weird stories. It

has a powerfully stimulating effect on the imagination."

"What are its effects?" I asked.

"It's a time drug," Hayward said, and watched us.

We stared back at him.

"I don't mean that the drug will enable the user to move in time—no. Not physically, at any rate. But by taking this drug I have been able to remember certain things that I have never experienced *in this life*."

"The drug enables one to recall his ancestral memories," he went on swiftly, earnestly. "What's so strange about that? I am able to remember past lives, previous reincarnations. You've heard of transmigration of souls—over one-half the population of the world believes in it. It's the doctrine that the soul leaves the body at death to enter another—like the hermit crab, moving from one shell to another."

"Impossible," I said. But I was remembering my strange flash of memory while I was examining one of the pellets.

"And why?" Hayward demanded. "Surely the soul, the living essence, has a memory. And if that hidden, submerged memory can be dragged from the subconscious into the conscious—the old mystics had strange powers and stranger knowledge, Gene. Don't forget that I've taken the drug."

"What was it like?" Mason wanted to know.

"It was—well like a flood of memory being poured into my mind—like a moving picture being unfolded—I can't make it clearer than that."

"It brought me to Italy, the first time. It was during the Borgia reign. I can remember it vividly—plots and counterplots, and finally a flight to France, where I—or rather this ancestor of mine—died in a tavern brawl. It was very vivid, very real."

"I've kept taking the drug ever since, although it isn't habit-forming. After I wake up from my dream-state—it lasts from two to four hours, generally—my mind feels clear, free, unleashed. That's when I do my writing."

"You have no idea how far back those ancestral memories go. Generations, ages, inconceivable eons! Back to Genghis Khan, back to Egypt and Babylon—and further than that, back to the fabulous sunken lands of Mu and Atlantis. It was in those first, primal memories, in a land which exists today only as a memory and a myth, that I first encountered those things—the horror you saw tonight. They existed on earth then, uncounted millenniums ago. And I—"

Again the skirling, shrill cry shrieked out. This time it sounded as if it came from directly above the cottage. I felt a sudden pang of cold, as though the temperature had taken an abrupt drop. There was a heavy, ominous hush in which the crashing of the surf sounded like the thunder of great drums.

SWEAT was standing out in beads on Hayward's forehead.

"I've called them to earth," he muttered dully, his shoulders drooping. "The *Mysteries of the Worm* gave a list of precautions to be taken before using the drug—the Pnakotic pentagon, the cabalistical signs of protection—things you wouldn't understand. The book gave terrible warnings of what might happen if those precautions weren't taken—it specifically mentioned those things—the 'dwellers in the Hidden World', it called them.

"But I—I neglected finally to safeguard myself. I didn't foresee—I thought I might get a stronger effect from the drug if I didn't take the directed precautions, improve my stories. I unbarred the gateway, and called them to earth again."

He stared into space, his eyes blank and unseeing. "I have committed terrible sin by my neglect," he muttered, it seemed to himself.

Mason was suddenly on his feet, his whole body shaking. "I can't stay here! It'll drive us all mad. It's only an hour's drive to Santa Barbara—I can't stand this waiting, waiting, with that thing outside gloating over us!"

Was Mason, too, losing his nerve!

His mind! In the face of this unseen menace, whatever it was?

Sea-birds, a mirage of spray—men, perhaps—were responsible for Mason's fear—I tried to tell myself that.

But deep in my heart I knew that no ordinary fear could have driven my two companions to the verge of craven hysteria. And I knew that I felt a strange reluctance to go out into that brooding, silent darkness on the beach.

"No," Hayward said. "We can't—that'd be walking right into the thing. We'll be all right in here—"

But there was no assurance in his voice.

"I can't stay here doing nothing!" Mason shouted. "I tell you, we'll all go crazy. Whatever that thing is—I've got my gun. And I'll stake bullets against it any time. I'm not staying here!"

He was beside himself. A short time ago the thought of venturing outside the cottage had seemed horrible to him; now he welcomed it as an escape from nerve-racking inaction. He pulled a vicious, flat automatic from his pocket, strode to the door.

Hayward was on his feet, stark horror in his eyes. "For the love of God, don't open that door!" he shouted.

But Mason flung open the door, ignoring him. A gust of icy wind blew in upon us. Outside fog was creeping in, sending greasy tendrils coiling like tentacles toward the doorway.

"Shut the door!" Hayward screamed as he lunged across the room. I made a hasty move forward as Mason sprang out into the darkness. I collided with Hayward, went reeling. I heard the gritty crunch of Mason's footsteps on the sand—and something else.

A shrill, mewing cry. Somehow—fierce, exultant. And it was answered from the distance by other cries, as though dozens of sea-birds were wheeling high above us, unseen in the fog.

I heard another strange little sound—I couldn't classify it. It sounded

vaguely like a shout that had been clipped off abruptly. There was a rushing howl of winds and I saw Hayward clinging to the door, staring out as though stupefied.

In a moment I saw why. Mason had vanished—utterly and completely, as though he had been borne off by a bird of prey. There was the empty beach, the low dunes to the left—but not a sign of Bill Mason.

I was dazed. He couldn't have sprinted from sight during the brief time my eyes had been turned away. Nor could he have hidden beneath the house, for it was boarded down to the sand.

Hayward turned a white, lined face to me. "They've got him," he whispered. "He wouldn't listen to me. Their first victim—God knows what will happen now."

Nevertheless we searched. It was vain. Bill Mason had vanished. We went as far as his car, but he wasn't there.

If the keys of the car had been in the dashboard, I might have urged Hayward to get into the car with me, to race from that haunted beach. I was growing afraid, but I dared not admit my fear even to myself.

WE went back to the cottage slowly.

"It's only a few hours till dawn," I said after we had sat and stared at each other for a while. "Mason—we can find him then."

"We'll never find him," Hayward

said dully. "He's in some hellish world we can't even imagine. He may, even be in another dimension."

I shook my head stubbornly. I couldn't, wouldn't believe. There must be some logical explanation, and I dared not lower my defences of skepticism and disbelief.

After a time we heard a shrill mewing from outside. It came again, and then several sharp cries at once. I lit a cigarette with trembling fingers, got up and paced the room nervously.

"That damned drug," I heard Hayward muttering. "It's opened the gateway—I have committed sin—"

I paused, my attention caught by a word, a sentence, on a sheet of paper in Hayward's typewriter. I ripped it from the platen.

"Material for a story," Hayward said bitterly, glancing up at the sound. "I wrote that two nights ago, when I first got the memory of the things. I've told you how those damnable pills work. I got the—the memory in the afternoon, and sat down to hammer out a story from it that night. I was—interrupted."

I didn't answer. I was reading, fascinated, that half-page of type. And as I read, an eerie spell of horror seemed to settle down over me, like a chill shroud of dank fog. For in that eldritch legend Hayward had written, there were certain disturbing hints of things that made my mind shudder away from their frightfulness, even while I recognized them.

[Turn Page]

Man Can Now Talk With God, Says Noted Psychologist

MOSCOW, IDAHO.—"A new and revolutionary religious teaching designed to show how we may find, understand and use the identical power which Jesus used, is attracting world-wide attention to its founder, Dr. Frank B. Robinson, noted psychologist and author."

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The manuscript read:

I dwelt in an archaic world. A world that had been long forgotten when Atlantis and Cimmeria flourished, a world so incredibly ancient that none of its records have ever come down through the ages.

The first human race dwelt in primal Mu, worshiping strange, forgotten gods—mountain-tall Cthulhu of the Watery Abyss, the Serpent Yig, Iod the Shining Hunter, Vorvados of the Gray Gulf of Yarnak.

And in those days there came to earth certain beings from another dimension of space, inhuman, monstrous creatures which desired to wipe out all life from the planet. These beings planned to leave their own dying world to colonize earth, building their titanic cities on this younger, more fruitful planet.

With their coming a tremendous conflict sprang into being, in which the gods friendly to mankind were arrayed against the hostile invaders. Foremost in that cyclopean battle, mightiest of earth's gods, was the Flaming One, Vorvados of Bel-Yarnak, and I, high priest of his cult, kindled—

There the manuscript ended.

Hayward had been watching me. "That was my—dream, Gene, when I last took the time-drug. It wasn't quite as clear as most of them—there are always blind spots, odd gaps where my memory somehow doesn't work. But the drug showed me what had happened in that prehistoric lifetime of mine, so many incarnations ago. We won—or rather our gods won. The invaders—those things—"

He broke off as a mewing cry sounded, very near, and then resumed in an unsteady voice. "They were driven back into their own world, their own dimension—and the gateway was closed, so they could not return. It's remained closed through all these eons.

"It would still be closed," he went on bitterly, "if I hadn't opened it with my experiments, or had taken the precautions the *Mysteries of the Worm* gave. Now they've got Mason—and that's all they need. I know that, somehow. A sacrifice to open the gate between this world and their own frightful dimension, so that their hordes can come pouring upon earth—

"That's how they got in before. By a human sacrifice—"

"Listen!" I held up my hand

urgently. The mewing cries had died, but there was another sound—a faint highpitched moaning coming from outside the cottage. Hayward didn't move.

"It may be Mason," I jerked out as I went to the door. Momentarily I hesitated, and then swung it open, stepped out on the sand. The moaning grew louder. Hayward slowly came up by my side. His eyes were sharper than mine, for as he peered into the fog-banks he gave a startled exclamation.

"Good God!" He flung out his arm, pointing. "*Look at that!*"

THEN I, too, saw it, and I stood there glaring at the thing, unable to move.

There, on that Pacific beach, with the yellow light from the open door pouring out into the fog, something was dragging itself painfully over the sand toward us—something distorted, misshapen, uttering little whimpering cries as it pulled itself along. It came into the beam of light and we saw it distinctly.

Beside me Hayward was swaying back and forth, making hoarse sounds as though he were trying to scream and couldn't. I stumbled back, flinging up my arm to shield my horrified eyes, croaking, "Keep away! For God's sake, stay back—you—you—you're not Bill Mason—*damn you, stay back!*"

But the thing kept on crawling toward us. The black, sightless hollows where its eyes had been were grim shadows in the dim light. It had been flayed alive, and its hands left red marks on the sand as it crept. A patch of bare white skull shone like a frightful tonsure on the crimsoned head.

Nor was that all—but I cannot bring myself to describe the dreadful and loathsomely abnormal *changes* that had taken place in the body of the thing that had been Bill Mason. And even as it crawled it was—changing!

A dreadful metamorphosis was overtaking it. It seemed to be losing its outline, to sprawl down until it wriggled rather than crawled along

the sand. Then I knew! In the space of seconds it was reversing the entire evolutionary upsurge of the human species! It squirmed there like a snake, losing its resemblance to anything human as I watched, sick and shuddering. It melted and shrank and shrivelled until there was nothing left but a loathsome foul ichor that was spreading in a black puddle of odious black slime. I heard myself gasping hysterical, unintelligible prayers. And suddenly a piercing shock of cold went through me. High in the fog I heard a mewing, shrill call.

Hayward clutched at my arm, his eyes blazing. "It's come," he whispered. "It's the sacrifice—they're breaking through!"

I swung about, leaped for the open door of the cottage. The icy, unnatural chill was numbing my body, slowing my movements. "Come on," I shouted at Hayward. "You fool, don't stay out there! There has been one sacrifice already! Must there be others!"

He flung himself into the house and I slammed and locked the door.

Shrill, unearthly cries were coming from all directions now, as though the things were calling and answering one another. I thought I sensed a new note in the cries—a note of expectation, of triumph.

The window-shade rolled up with a rattle and a snap, and the fog began to move past the pane, coiling and twisting fantastically. At a sudden gust the window shook in its casing. Hayward said under his breath, "Atmospheric disturbances—oh, my God! Poor Mason—watch the door, Gene!" His voice was strangled.

For a moment I saw nothing. Then the door bulged inward as though frightful pressure had been applied from without. A panel cracked with a rending sound, and I caught my breath. Then—it was gone.

The metal doorknob had a white rime of frost on it. "This—this isn't real," I said madly, although I was shuddering in the icy cold.

"Real enough. They're breaking through—"

Then Hayward said something so strange that it brought me around sharply, staring at him. Gazing vacantly at me, like a man in a hypnagogic state, he muttered in a queer guttural voice:

"The fires burn on Nergu-K'nyan and the Watchers scan the night skies for the Enemies—*ny'ghan tharanak grii*—"

"Hayward!" I seized his shoulders, shook him. Life came back into his eyes.

"Blind spot," he muttered. "I remembered something—now it's gone. . . ."

HE flinched as a new outburst of the mewing cries came from above the house.

But a strange, an incredible surmise, had burst upon my brain. There was a way out, a key of deliverance from evil—Hayward had it and did not know it!

"Think," I said breathlessly. "Think hard! What was it—that memory?"

"Does that matter now? This—" He saw the expression on my face, its meaning flashed across to him and he answered, not quickly, not slowly, but dreamily: "I seemed to be on a mountain peak, standing before the altar of Vorvadoss, with a great fire flaming up into the darkness. Around me there were priests in white robes—watchers—"

"Hayward," I cried. "Vorvadoss—look here!" I snatched up the half-page of manuscript, read from it hastily. "*The gods friendly to man were arrayed against the invaders—*"

"I see what you mean!" Hayward cried. "We triumphed—then. But now—"

"Hayward!" I persisted desperately. "Your flash of memory just now! You were standing on a mountain while the Watchers scanned the night skies for the Enemies, you said. The Enemies must have been those creatures. Suppose the Watchers saw them?"

Suddenly the house shook under an impact that was not the work of the screaming wind. God! Would my efforts bear fruit too late? I

heard an outburst of the shrill cries, and the door creaked and splintered. It was dreadfully cold. We were flung against the wall, and I staggered, almost losing my balance. Again the house rocked under another battering-ram impact. My teeth were chattering, and I could hardly speak. A black dizziness was creeping up to overwhelm me, and my hands and feet had lost all feeling. Out of a whirling sea of darkness I saw Hayward's white face.

"It's a chance," I gasped, fighting back the blackness. "Wouldn't there—have been some way of summoning the gods, the friendly gods—if the Watchers saw the Enemies? You—you were high priest—in that former life. You'd know—how—to summon—"

The door crashed, broke. I heard wood being torn ruthlessly apart, but I dared not turn.

"Yes!" Hayward cried. "I remember—there was a word!"

I saw his frightened gaze shift past me to the horror that I knew was ripping at the broken door. I fumbled for his shoulders, managed to turn him away. "You must! Think, man—"

Abruptly a light flared in his eyes. He was reacting at last.

He flung up his arms and began a weird, sonorous chant. Strangely archaic-sounding words flowed from his tongue fluently, easily. But now I had no eyes for him—I was glaring at the horror that was squeezing itself through the splintered gap it had torn in the wall.

IT WAS the thing Hayward had sketched, revealed in all its loathsome reality!

My dizziness, my half-fainting state, saved me from seeing the thing too clearly. As it was, a scream of utter horror ripped from my throat as I saw, through a spinning whirlpool of darkness, a squamous, glowing ball covered with squirming, snake-like tentacles—translucent ivory flesh, leprous and hideous—a great faceted eye that held the cold stare of the Midgard Serpent. I seemed to be dropping, spinning,

falling helplessly down toward a welter of writhing, glossy tentacles . . . and dimly I could hear Hayward still chanting. . . .

"*Iä! Rhyn tharanak—Vorvados of Bel-Yarnak! The Troubler of the Sands! Thou Who waiteth in the Outer Dark, Kindler of the Flame—n'gha shugg y'haa—*"

He pronounced a Word. A Word of Power, which my stunned ears could scarcely hear. Yet hear it I did. And I felt that beyond the borders of human consciousness and understanding, that Word was flashing and thundering, through the intergalactic spaces to the farthest abyss. And in primeval night and chaos Something heard, and rose up, and obeyed the summons.

For, with the suddenness of a thunderclap, blackness fell on the room, hiding from my sight the monstrous glowing thing that was plunging toward us. I heard a dreadful skirling cry—and then there was utter silence, in which I could not even hear the recurrent crashing of the surf. The abysmal cold sent sharp flashes of pain through me.

Then, out of the darkness, there rose up before us a Face. I saw it through a haze of silvery mist that clung about it like a veil. It was utterly inhuman, for the half-seen features were arranged in a pattern different to mankind, seeming to follow the strange pattern of some unfamiliar and alien geometry. Yet it did not frighten, it calmed.

Through the silver mist I made out strange hollows, fantastic curves and planes. Only the eyes were clear, unmistakable—black as the empty wastes between the stars, cold in their unearthly wisdom.

There were tiny dancing flames flickering in those eyes, and there were little flames, too, playing over the strange, inhuman countenance. And although not a shadow of emotion passed over those brooding, passionless eyes, I felt a wave of reassurance. Suddenly all fear left me. Beside me, unseen in the darkness, I heard Hayward whisper, "Vorvados! The Kindler of the Flame!"

Swiftly the darkness receded, the face faded to a shadowy dimness. I was looking, not at the familiar walls of the cottage, but at another world. I had gone down with Hayward into the profundities of the past.

I seemed to be standing in a vast amphitheatre of jet, and around me, towering to a sky sprinkled with an infinite multitude of cold stars, I could see a colossal and shocking city of scalene black towers and fortresses, of great masses of stone and metal, arching bridges and cyclopean ramparts. And with racking horror I saw teeming loathsomely in that nightmare city the spawn of that alien dimension.

HUNDREDS, thousands—surging multitudes of them, hanging motionless in the dark, clear air, resting quiescent on the tiers of the amphitheatre, surging across the great cleared spaces. I caught glimpses of glittering eyes, cold and unwinking; pulpy, glowing masses of semi-transparent flesh; monstrous reptilian appendages that swam before my eyes as the things moved loathsomely. I felt contaminated, defiled. I think I shrieked, and my hands flew up to shut out that intolerable vision of lost Abaddon—the dimension of the Invaders.

And abruptly that other-world vision snapped out and vanished.

I saw the godlike, alien Face fleetingly, felt the cool glance of those strange, omniscient eyes. Then it was gone, and the room seemed to rock and sway in the grip of cosmic

forces. As I staggered and almost fell I saw again around me the walls of the cottage.

The unbearable chill was no longer in the air; there was no sound but the pounding of the surf. The wind still sent the fog twisting past the window, but the brooding, oppressive feeling of age-old evil had utterly vanished. I sent an apprehensive glance at the shattered door, but there was no trace of the horror that had burst into the cottage.

Hayward was leaning limply against the wall, breathing in great gasps. We looked at each other dumbly. Then, moved by a common impulse, we went, half staggering, to the splintered gap where the door had been, out on to the sand.

The fog was fading, vanishing, torn into tatters by a cool, fresh wind. A starlit patch of night sky glittered above the cottage.

"Driven back," Hayward whispered. "As they were once before—back to their own dimension, and the gateway locked. But not before a life was taken by them . . . the life of our friend . . . may Heaven forgive me for that. . . ."

Suddenly he turned, went stumbling back into the cottage, great dry sobs racking him.

And my cheeks, too, were wet.

He came out. I stood at his side as he threw the time-pellets into the sea. Never again would he go back to the past. He would live henceforth in the present, and a little in the future—as was more fitting, decenter, for human beings to do. . . .

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CHANGELING



Where Sarah had stood now crouched a chubby, rosy little girl

*These Misbegotten Beings Are Usually the Creatures of
Elves and Fairies, But This One Was the Progeny
of the Unknowable Malignities!*

By **MANLY WADE WELLMAN**

Author of "Dream Dust from Mars," "Glimpse," etc.

THE series of deaths at Wauketa has never been completely explained. The townspeople were too exorcised at the time to talk sanely, then or thereafter. The newspapers were less understanding than usual. And today the only living actor in the inner drama does not remember clearly.

Not that he is senile; David Gaul was thirty-six last birthday. But he was only eight years old when his father, the professor, took him to call on Derwyd Evans. Naturally his recollections come in patches alternately vivid and vague, like a crazy quilt. It was only recently that he cared to discuss them at all.

His childish impressions of Wauketa might go for any midwestern hamlet that summer—dinginess, dryness, overalled farmers with battered wagons and sleepy horses, a hot sun overhead and not a breath of wind.

Professor Gaul's brass-bound automobile was a novelty sufficient to draw a group of loafers as soon as it came to a halt on the main street. The clustered faces seemed friendly enough until Professor Gaul asked the way to Derwyd Evans' home. Then every brow scowled.

DAVID remembers his sudden panic at the evident change of heart toward him and his father. The oldest of the group cleared his throat nastily before he spoke:

"Turn right, next corner. Drive to the end of that lane. You'll see his flower gardens." Again a clearing of the throat, a dextrous stream of amber tobacco juice from between bearded lips. "What you say you want to see him about?"

"Thanks," replied the professor. His blue eyes glinted and his mouth set itself under his trim moustache as he manipulated the car's ponderous starting system. Everybody moved back from the brass-bound monster as it awakened to growling life. Professor Gaul drove around the corner indicated.

David was nervous with the sense of hostile glares that followed them. The car rolled between pallid, paint-thirsty houses and wilted yards.

"There's a black ribbon on that door, Dad," said the boy. "And there's another farther down."

"People are dead in those houses," his father informed him.

David, to whom death was not a reality as yet, felt curious rather than disturbed. "Are lots of people dying?" he asked.

"Lots," replied his father. And David saw more knots of crepe on other houses as they passed.

"Why did they die?" was his next question.

"We're going to find out," said the professor.

He braked the car to a halt at the end of the lane. There, in sharp and

disturbing contrast to the sere and withered lawns they had seen, was a stretch of bright green grass and gay flower-beds. Professor Gaul gazed piercingly at the pleasant, almost lush growth, and his blue eyes turned frosty as they lifted to the brick house in the midst of the grass and flowers. He dropped a lean, brown hand upon his son's shoulder.

"David," he said gently, "I brought you along because I need your help."

The boy thrilled to the suggestion at once. "Yes, Dad?"

"It isn't that I like to carry you into what might be danger; but good men have to face these things to help the world. Don't they?"

"Yes, Dad," said David.

"All right, pay attention." The gentle voice grew earnest. "In this house live a man and a woman and a little girl. You'll probably be invited to play with the girl."

"Aw, gee!" protested David, who was at the threshold of the age when playing with girls is regarded as sissyish.

"Do it to help me," urged the professor. "You see, I suspect something—I got the clue to what I suspect out of an old book—but I'm not sure. Be civil, son, and try not to quarrel with her. On the other hand, be careful. Don't take anything she offers without looking closely at it first. Above all, eat nothing she gives you. And if something happens to frighten you, set up a yell for me."

"Who's scared of girls?" demanded David stoutly.

His father laughed and cuffed him affectionately on the nape of the neck. The two got out and walked side by side up a stone-flagged path between the flower-beds, then mounted the porch. Professor Gaul knocked at the door of the house.

The man who opened to them was plump-bodied and not as tall as the spare professor. David noticed with surprised distaste that he wore high heels on his stout tan shoes, as if to increase his inadequate stature. Green eyes bulged from his pink moon of a face and he flaunted a bristly, tawny-red mustache.

"Yus, sir," he greeted them cordially, with a clipped accent strange to David. "You must be Perfussor Gaul. I got your letter, sir. Honored." He pronounced the H. "Won't you step into the 'ouse, you and the young gent?"

"Thanks," said David's father. He urged David along with a touch on the arm, and they entered the house together.

The front room was of a cool, green dimness, by reason of drawn blinds. David's quick eye caught first a flimsy table piled with ornate books, a shelf with more volumes across the room, then a mantel of imitation marble on which stood a glass dome with a brilliant stuffed bird inside. He yearned to examine that treasure, but he had been taught early not to request such privileges in strange houses.

AS HE stared about, a woman came in by a rear door and stood by the plump man. She was a gaunt, sharp-faced creature in a high-necked dress of brown stuff, the kind of garment once called "sensible." Only one ornament relieved it, an ivory buckle or clip on the voluminous skirt—but stay . . . it was not an ornament, it was a tiny pale hand clutched there—a hand that seemed free from any arm or body, yet was manifestly alive!

David's heart gave a skipping throb, and voluntarily he shrank close to his father. Then he knew sudden relief as the owner of the hand stole into view from behind the woman.

It was a girl of David's own age or a little more, a spidery little thing with dead black hair and eyes. Her mouth was like a painted red lozenge in the midst of her pallid, young-old face. She still clung to the woman's skirt with one hand and picked at the edge of her dotted pinafore with the other, a childish gesture that seemed somehow deliberate, like a grown actress playing a little girl. Her first gaze was for the professor. She gave David her second glance, then her eyes went back to his father, with some-

thing in them like shrewd apprehension.

The plump man who, David realized, must be Mr. Derwyd Evans, was making a ceremony of introductions. "The moddom, Perfussor," he announced with a flourish. "My dear, this is Perfussor Gaul, who wants to interview me about the trial, you know. And this," with a lardy smile at David, "is young Master Gaul." He paused, and let his proud green eyes caress the girl. "Our dotter, Perfussor," he continued. "Make a courtesy, Sarah." He pronounced it Sayrah.

The child bobbed up and down with the suddenness of a weaving boxer. She still gazed at Professor Gaul, who gave her his best twinkle. Her answering smile was of the thinnest.

Derwyd Evans continued: "Sayrah was quite a figger in the trial. My star witness, and all that." He patted the child's dead-looking hair. "How so?" inquired Professor Gaul.

"Why, she was in it from the first," volunteered Mrs. Evans. "Everybody who died—every soul—had been given flowers by Sarah. It was claimed that they died at night, with the flowers in vases by their beds."

She lifted her sharp shoulders, in a shrug or a shudder. David could not tell which.

"And so the law made its expected mistake," added her husband. "They would 'ave it—the state's attorney and all—that there was poison in the flowers, and that I'd sent it by my little girl. But Sarah testified. She'd picked the posies herself, like the sweet, thoughtful child she is, and took them around with no word from me."

"Naturally, she was believed," Gaul summed up for them. "A child's evidence, given simply and straightforwardly, is almost always believed. Rightly so." He smiled at Sarah. "I've noticed the flowers. The only fresh ones in town, I dare say."

"Keerect," nodded Evans, cuddling Sarah's bony face between his fist

and flank. "It's been cruel hot and dry. But Sayrah here tends the beds morning and night—plants, waters, weeds, like the patron saint of gardeners."

Young David could have sworn the girl flinched at the simile.

"You'd think she magicked 'em, they do so well. Anyway, the case was declared no trial. And they're trying to solve things with doctors, not police."

"I noticed people are still dying," observed Gaul.

"Right you are." Mr. Evans seemed almost pleased at the thought. "I can't rightly offer sympathies, either. Free or no free, the people suspect and hate me. And nobody will take flowers from Sayrah."

He gazed fondly down into the child's face. "Go and play with young Master David, there's a good girl."

"I want to stay," she demurred. Her voice had a buzz in it—a bee in a fairy tale might talk like that. Her eyes had never left Professor Gaul.

"But I want to talk to the gentleman alone," Mr. Evans coaxed. "He's going to write an article about us—for the records at the state university, and all that."

SARAH was not as impressed as her father, nor as cordial. David, catching the professor's eye, sensed what was wanted of him.

"Come on, Sarah," he said at once, and took her by the hand. Her thin, dry fingers were like a bundle of sun-bleached twigs. She said nothing, but let him lead her out of doors and down upon the lawn. There he released his hold upon her hand and they faced each other.

"You want to play," she said. "Do you know my sort of games?"

"What are your games?" he asked. "Do you play house?" He hated the thought of any such effeminate pastime, but he was helping his father.

"House?" she echoed. "Yes, I have a little house of my own."

She was speaking with the kind of superior gravity that he had encountered in adults who did not like

him. Dashed, but determined to remain on good terms, he smiled his best.

"Come," she said, and again put her dry hand in his. She led him around the corner of the brick dwelling. David paused, wide-eyed, to look at one of the beds of flowers. They were strange to him, and somehow fleshy, like pictures he had seen of blooms in tropic jungles. The brilliant colors—blood-red, indigo-blue, canary-yellow—held his eye and at the same time hurt it. The perfume that stole up was really a combination of several, musky-sweet and heady.

"What are these flowers?" he asked Sarah. She shook her head.

"I do not know their names."

"Then I'll ask your father," he offered, and turned toward the front of the yard. But she clung to his hand.

"He does not know their names, either. Come."

She drew him after her, to the back yard.

It, too, was richly spread with grass, flowers and shrubs.

But today he remembers with clarity only the little hut or bower, covered like a trellis with vines. The vine-leaves were of a green so vivid as to seem dyed, and set among them were numerous tight, pallid buds.

"Those bloom at night," Sarah informed him. She drew aside some of the vines and revealed a small door, no larger than a burrow. "Come inside," she invited, with her first evidence of cordiality.

"That's too little a door for your father and mother," said David. He was thinking of his own back yard and his play quarters in the stable. The professor frequently visited him there, and only last week had helped him blow birds' eggs.

"I know it," returned the girl succinctly, and flung herself down on her stomach to enter. She slid through the opening as easily and swiftly as a lizard, but David, who had thought himself smaller than she, had quite a wriggle of it.

The gloomy interior was intriguing but not exactly cozy. For one thing,

the floor was covered with turf—cool and yet hard to appreciate with the absence of sunlight. The planking of the walls seemed spread with a smooth, pinkish substance. Touching it, David found it as soft as velvet, and it gave him the same unpleasant prickly shiver that he got from the sudden contact of peach down. It might have been a woven fabric, or a growth as of lichens. He does not pretend today to know which.

Sarah squatted on her haunches, child-fashion. Her bare, bony knees thrust up on either side of her like the rear elbows of a cricket.

"How would you like something to eat?" she asked.

David shook his head. "My father says not to eat before tea," he apologized, wondering at the same time where she kept any eatables. There was nothing in the way of container or other furniture inside the playhouse. Floor and walls were quite smooth, so far as he could see.

Just then something sighed or moaned in an opposite corner.

The boy started violently and almost made a dash for the door. But then he saw that Sarah betrayed no fear or surprise. She turned on her hunkers and crossed the floor without rising. From behind, it looked as though she made two crouching hops, like a toad. In the corner she pawed with her hands, pressing the grass-tufts back from a small, dark hole.

"All's well," she mumbled down into it.

David thought that this reassurance was for him. Standing up—the ceiling was high enough for that—he took a step toward Sarah. But she motioned for him to stand back, and crouched lower over the orifice. Again the moan stole out of it. Then a gusty voice:

"We are famished," it breathed.

A pause, and David smiled. The girl was entertaining him by some trick of ventriloquism. He had seen such things in vaudeville theaters. But just as he started to say so, she frowned up at him for silence. Again the voice from the shadowy hole:

"We prosper only when men die." It was querulous, insistent. "You know that."

"But I'm suspected," Sarah began argumentatively. "Nobody will take—"

"What about the child with you?" broke in the unseen speaker. "Make haste. We sent you among men for the sake of—"

"Hush!" interrupted Sarah in turn. "I've already planned it."

She pushed the grass back across the opening and rose to confront David.

HE DID not like her set expression, nor the way she held one hand behind her back. "Who was that talking?" he demanded.

She shook her head. "Nothing you'd understand about," she put him off. "Here, do you want a flower?"

Abruptly her hand came into sight. It held a golden blossom. Not yellow or orange or any other living color—it was golden, like his mother's brooch, or the five-dollar piece the president of the university had given him last Christmas, or the tassels on rich velvet curtains he had seen somewhere.

The petals were well open, and in the center of them was the flower's heart, dark and lustrous and mystic, like the eye of a small night creature. Taken off guard, David almost reached for it. Then he remembered his father's caution and drew back his hand, bending instead for a closer look. He spluttered with sudden revulsion and drew back.

"It smells like sweat," he complained. "Did you get it out of that hole—where that talking came out?"

"I want you to have it," urged Sarah, and tried to thrust it into the front of his jacket. He took another backward step, and she advanced at the same moment. Panic, mysterious but overwhelming, entered him.

"I don't want it," he protested hoarsely, and then threw himself toward the entrance. A struggling scramble and he was through with dirt smeared on his clothes and a

button gone from his blouse. As he straightened up, thankful for the warmth and glow of the sun, Sarah was standing beside him again. It was as though she had stepped through the wall of the playhouse.

"All right," she conceded loftily, as though she understood and scorned his fear of the golden flower. "I'll pick you some from the beds out here. Surely," and a fiercer sneer colored her tone, "you won't be afraid of them."

She strolled to the side of the house, and her hands busied themselves among the radiant plants. David, every nerve still tingling with the fear that had saddled him in the playhouse, walked quickly past her. He would have gone to the front door, sought out his father and pressed him to take him away. But voices poured from an open window near the porch, and he slackened his pace to be comforted by them.

Professor Gaul was speaking politely: "So you're originally from Devonshire, Mr. Evans?"

"Brought up there—yus, sir," floated forth the affable reply. "Mrs. E., of course, is native Hamerican. It was 'er that got me to come to the States."

"And your daughter was born in England?" pursued Gaul.

"Oh, yus. Proper subject of the king." Mr. Evans was proud. "She's been 'ere, though, ever since she was a year old."

"Devonshire," harked back the professor. "You have interesting legends there—of imps and monsters and bewitchments."

David went on past the window. He was almost to the porch when Sarah spoke at his elbow.

"If you don't like that flower," she said, "here are some pretty ones. Look!"

Her description hardly did justice to the bouquet. David had never seen its equal. Two or three specimens, he thinks today, must have been rather splendid and valuable orchids, such as grow only in select hothouses. He cannot explain their presence in the open yard of a mid-western cottage.

There were others, long and white, like lilies, that he finds himself totally unable to identify. And a single thick green stalk held three small but turgid-looking buds, each of a different color—violet, red and yellow.

All these things he noted well without taking the gift, for he was decidedly afraid of Sarah. His eyes probed deep into the heart of the nosegay. All at once he was aware of something half-concealed among the leaves—something gleaming golden.

"You're trying to give me that sweaty thing!" he accused.

Her face darkened. "Take it, you fool," she commanded in a terrible voice, and clutched his shoulder with her free hand.

DAVID wailed with fear—he remembered it ashamedly—and tore himself free. He turned and ran. The porch was high, but he sprang upon it without using the steps, clutched the knob of the door and wrenched it open.

Professor Gaul and the Evanses, seated around the table, glanced up with good-natured smiles.

"Hullo, Master David," the plump head of the house greeted him. "In time for tea, eh? It's almost ready."

"Yes," nodded Mrs. Evans. "I'll fetch it now."

She rose and glided into the rear of the house with a heavy swish of her long brown skirts.

David came into the room, looking mutely to his father for help. He did not want to glance back, for he knew that Sarah had entered behind him. He felt her eyes, scorching into his back like the points of two hot pokers.

"How do you do, Professor Gaul?" she said over David's shoulder. The bee-buzz was in her voice again, soft but menacing.

Gaul rose and smiled down at her. At the same time he held out a hand and David came gladly to seize it. His father's steady touch gave him strength and courage. He dared turn and look at Sarah.

Tense, determined lines creased

her thin face around the mouth and at the corners of the eyes. In her hand was the bouquet, held out as if she would press it upon Gaul.

"David was afraid to touch these," she informed the professor. "If they don't hurt me, why should they hurt him?"

Her own father's green eyes popped jovially. "Why, indeed?" he chuckled.

"Take them," said Sarah, planting herself before Professor Gaul.

David's father continued to smile. "I will, in a minute," he temporized. "We're just going to have tea. Are you hungry?"

Mrs. Evans had come in, carefully balancing a big brass tray. It was burdened with a teapot, a steaming kettle, and a plate of frosted cookies.

Sarah frowned. "I don't think you like my flowers, Professor Gaul," she said, in a queer, taunting tone. She sounded at least sixty years old, and wise and wicked to match.

Gaul laughed cheerily, as though she had made the most delightful joke. "And you," he bantered in turn, "don't like tea, do you?"

WITHOUT letting go of David, he shot out his free hand like the paw of a cat. From Mrs. Evans' tray he snatched the kettle of hot water. With the same movement, in the same instant of time he dashed it full into the tense face of Sarah.

She squeaked, like a bat knocked down in mid-flight. The air was suddenly full of steam—or smoke. David smelled something pungent and rotten. Then the vapor was gone, as abruptly as it had risen.

Mrs. Evans stood with feet planted, her mouth open in uncomprehending surprise, the tray shaking in her hands. Beside her, risen from his chair and standing with bent knees as if ready for a spring, her husband sputtered and goggled. The professor and David remained hand in hand. But Sarah was gone.

Where she had stood to offer the flowers now crouched a chubby, rosy little girl, naked as a new-born babe. She rose slowly to her feet. She was

of David's age, approximately, but not so tall as he by several inches. Her face was as healthy and blank as Derwyd Evans' own. Her hair was tawny and red, like his mustache. And, like his, her eyes were large and round and green.

The first to speak was Derwyd Evans. "Wh-what's come over Sarah?" he bleated.

Gaul muttered, more in soliloquy than reply:

"Those old books were right. Such things can't stand up under boiling water." He faced Mrs. Evans, who was setting a tray upon the table with the slow care of the stunned. "This proves that you two aren't guilty in the least. Only blind to what you were nourishing."

"But our Sarah—" began the woman.

"She wasn't your Sarah," Gaul corrected her. "This is your child. Look at her, and be convinced. The other creature was substituted for her at birth, by what evil power we know not." He drew a deep breath, as if the explanation tired him. "She was a changeling."

"Changeling," repeated Evans, as if in a dream. "Changeling."

Professor Gaul nodded across the room.

"Isn't that a dictionary on your shelf yonder? Look the word up. I think that you find it says a changeling is a child secretly substituted for another in infancy by fairies or elves—only in this case, the substitution must perforce have been made by creatures incredibly malign."

Evans faced slowly around and stared at the dictionary as though it were the greatest wonder he had seen that afternoon. But his wife was holding out a trembling hand to the little naked girl, who smiled up at her.

"Come on, David." The professor led his son to the door, and out into the open.

All around the house the flowers and grass had withered, strangely and completely. The yard looked like any of the others along the street.

*Eyes Focused on Infinity, an Artist-Scientist Beholds a
Horrific World Not Meant for Mortal Eyes
to Look Upon!*



*Those forms
were spawned
in nightmares
and dreams of
the Pit*

The Sorcerer's Jewel

By TARLETON FISKE

BY RIGHTS, I should not be telling this story. David is the one to tell it, but then, David is dead. Or is he?

That's the thought that haunts me, the dreadful possibility that in some way David Niles is still alive—in some unnatural, unimaginable way

alive. That is why I shall tell the story; unburden myself of the onerous weight which is slowly crushing my mind.

But David Niles could do it properly. Niles was a photographer; he could give the technical terms, perhaps explain coherently many things

that I do not pretend to understand. I can only guess, or hint.

Niles and I shared a studio together for several years. It was a true partnership—we were both friends and business associates. This was peculiar in itself, for we were dissimilar types, with widely divergent interests. We differed in almost every particular.

I am tall, thin, and dark. Niles was short, plump, and fair. I am naturally lazy, moody, inclined towards introspection. Niles was always tense with energy, high-spirited, volatile. My chief interests, in latter years, have leaned towards metaphysics and a study of occultism. Niles was a skeptic, a materialist, and above all, a scientist. Still, together, we formed an integrated personality—I, the dreamer; Niles, the doer.

Our mutual business association, as I have already intimated, lay in the field of photography.

David Niles was one of the most brilliant personalities in the domain of modern portrait photography. For several years prior to our association he had done salon work, exhibiting internationally and creating a reputation which brought him a considerable income from private sittings.

AT THE time of our meeting he had become dissatisfied with commercial work. Photography, he argued, was an art; an art best nourished by serious, solitary study unimpeded by the demands of catering to customers. He therefore determined to retire for a year or so and devote himself to experiment.

I was the partner he chose for the work. He had lately become a devotee of the William Mortensen school of photography. Mortensen, of course, is the leading exponent of fantasy in photography; his studies of monstrosities and grotesques are widely known. Niles believed that in fantasy, photography most closely approximated true art. The idea of picturing the abstract fascinated him; the thought that a modern camera could photograph dream worlds and blend fancy with reality seemed intriguing. That's where I came in.

Niles knew of my interest in the occult, knew that I had made a study of mythology. I was to serve as technical adviser on his subject matter. The arrangement pleased us both.

At first Niles limited himself to studies in physiognomy. With his usual thoroughness, he mastered the technique of photographic makeup and hired models whose features lent themselves to the application of gargoylean disguises. I handled the matter of checking over reference works, finding illustrations in old books of legends to use in devising suitable makeup.

Niles did a study of Pan, one of a satyr, and a Medusa. He became interested in demons, and we spent some time on his *Gallery of Fiends* series; Asmodeus, Azazel, Sammael, and Beelzebub. They were surprisingly good.

But for some reason or other, Niles was not satisfied. The quality of the photographs was excellent, the posing effective, the characterization superb. And still Niles did not feel that he was achieving his goal.

"Human figures," he stormed. "Human faces are, after all, only human faces, no matter how much you cover them up with grease-paint and putty. What I want is the soul of Fantasy, not the outward aping."

He strode up and down the studio, gesticulating in his feverish manner. "What have we got?" he demanded. "A lot of stupid horror-movie faces. Amateur Karloffs. Kid stuff. No, we must find something else."

So the next phase was modelling clay. I was handy here, for I had a rudimentary knowledge of sculpture. We spent hours on composing scenes from an imaginary Inferno; constructing bat-winged figures that flew against bizarre, other-worldly backgrounds of fire, and great malignant demons that squatted and brooded on jagged peaks overlooking the Fiery Pit.

But here, too, Niles could not find what he was looking for.

One night he exploded again, after finishing a set. With a sweep of his arm he smashed the papier-mâché set and its clay figures to the floor.

"Hokum," he muttered. "Peep-show, penny-dreadful stuff."

I sighed, getting set to listen patiently to a further tirade.

"I don't want to be the Gustave Doré of photography, or the Sime, or even the Artzybasheff," he said. "I don't want to copy any style. What I'm after is something original, something I can claim as absolutely individual."

I shrugged. Wisdom had taught me to keep my mouth shut and let Niles talk himself out.

"I've been on the wrong track," he declared. "If I photograph things as they are, that's all I'm going to get. I build a clay set, and by Heaven, when I photograph it, all I can get is a picture of that clay set—a flat, two-dimensional thing at that. I take a portrait of a man in makeup and my result is a photo of a man in makeup. I can't hope to catch something with the camera that isn't there. The answer is—change the camera. Let the instrument do the work."

I saw his argument, and conceded its validity.

THE following few weeks Niles' existence was a frenzy of experimental activity. He began to take montage shots. Then he worked with odd papers, odder exposures. He even reverted to the Mortensen principles and employed distortion—bending and twisting the negative so that prints showed elongated or flattened figures in nightmarish fashion.

An ordinary man's forehead, under these methods, would register as being hydrocephalic; his eyes might appear as bulging beacons illumined by insane lights. The perspective of nightmare, the nuances of oneirodynia, the hallucinative images of the demented were reproduced by distortion. Pictures were shadowed, shaded; portions blocked out or moulded into weird backgrounds.

And then came a night when Niles again paced the floor, tracing a restless path through piles of torn-up prints. "I'm not getting it," he murmured. "I can take a natural subject and distort it, but I can't actually change its content. In order to photo-

graph the unreal, I must see the unreal. See *the unreal*—Good Lord, why didn't I think of that before?"

He stood before me, his hands twitching. "I studied painting once, you know. My instructor—old Gifford, the portrait man—hung a certain picture in his studio. It was the old boy's masterpiece. The painting was of a winter scene, in oils; a winter scene of a farmhouse.

"Now here's the point. Gifford had two pairs of spectacles; one sensitive to infra-red, the other to ultra-violet rays. He'd show a guest the winter scene, then ask him to try on the first pair of spectacles and look again. Through the glasses the picture showed the same farmhouse on a summer day. The second pair of lenses gave a view of the farmhouse in autumn. He had painted three layers, and the proper lenses each showed a different picture."

"So what?" I ventured.

Niles talked faster, his excitement increasing.

"So this. Remember the war? The Germans used to camouflage machine-gun nests and field batteries. They did it quite elaborately; painting the guns with leafy hues and using artificial plant formations to cover them up. Well, American observation posts employed ultra-violet lenses in field glasses to spot the camouflaging. Through the glasses the natural leaves showed up in entirely different colors in comparison to the artificially painted ones, which lacked ultra-violet pigment.

"I still don't see the point."

"Use ultra-violet and infra-red lenses in photography and we'll get the same effect," he almost shouted.

"But isn't that just an extension of the ordinary color-filter principle?" I asked.

"Perhaps. But we can combine them with reground lenses of various types—lenses that will distort perspective in themselves. So far we've merely distorted form, shape. But with both color and form distorted, we can achieve the type of photography I'm striving for—fantasy, pure and simple. We'll focus on fantasy and reproduce it without

tampering with any objects. Can you imagine what this room will look like with its colors reversed, some of them absent completely; with the furniture shapes altered, the very walls distorted?"

I couldn't, but I was soon privileged to actually see it. For Niles at once began another cycle; he experimented endlessly with the new lenses he brought in daily. He sent out special orders for grinding, spent time studying the physical laws of light, enmeshed himself in technicalities I cannot pretend to comprehend. The results were startling.

THE *outré* views he had promised me materialized. After a final day of effort before the camera and in the dark-room, we gazed together on a wonderful new world created right here in our own studio. I marveled at some of the effects Niles had created.

"Splendid," he gloated. "It all seems to tie in with the accepted scientific theories, too. Know what I mean? The Einsteinian notions of coexistence; the space-time continuum ideas."

"The Fourth Dimension?" I echoed.

"Exactly. New worlds all around us—within us. Worlds we never dream of exist simultaneously with our own; right here in this spot there are other existences. Other furniture, other people, perhaps. And other physical laws. New forms, new color."

"That sounds metaphysical to me, rather than scientific," I observed. "You're speaking of the Astral Plane—the continuous linkage of existence."

We were back again at our perpetual squabbling point—science or occultism; physical versus psychical reality.

"The Fourth Dimension is Science's way of interpreting the metaphysical truths of existence," I maintained.

"The metaphysical truths of existence are the psychological lies of *dementia praecox* victims," he asserted.

"Your pictures don't lie," I answered.

"My pictures are taken by recognized scientific means," he said.

"Your pictures are taken by means older than science," I replied. "Ever hear of lithomancy? Divination by the use of jewels. Ever hear of crystal-gazing? For ages, men have peered into the depths of precious stones, gazed through polished, specially cut and ground glasses, and seen new worlds."

"Absurd. Any oculist can tell you that—"

"You don't have to finish that one," I cut in. "Any oculist will tell you that we really see everything upside down. Our minds alone interpret the retinal image as being right-side up. Any oculist will tell you that muscicularly, a near-sighted person is really far-sighted, and a far-sighted person is near-sighted."

I warmed to my theme. "Any oculist will tell you that the hand is quicker than the eye; that mirages and hallucinations are actually 'seen' by the brain, rather than by the actual retina. In fact, any oculist will tell you that the phenomenon of sight has very little to do with either actual perception or the true laws of light.

"Look at the cat—contrary to popular impression a nyctalops. Yet men can train themselves similarly. Reading, too, is a matter of the mind rather than of minute perception. And so I say to you, don't be too sure of your laws of optics, and your scientific theories of light. We see a lot no physical laws will ever explain. The Fourth Dimension can be approached only through angles—science must concede that in theorization. And your lenses are cut similarly. It all goes back to occultism in the end—occultism, not 'oculism' or ophthalmology."

It was a long speech for me, and it must have astonished Niles, who glowered at me, speechless for once.

"I'll prove it," I went on. "Let me cut you a lens."

"What?"

"I'll go down to a friend of mine and borrow a few stones from him. There are some Egyptian crystals there which were used by the seers

for divination. They claimed that they could see other worlds through the angles of the jewels. And I'm willing to bet you that you'll get pictures through them that will make you forget experiments with Iceland spar and quartz and all the rest; pictures you and your scientific ideas won't so readily explain."

"All right. I'll call you on that," Niles snapped. "Bring me the stones."

SO THE next day I went down to Isaac Voorden's. I went with misgivings. The truth was that I had been half bragging when I had spoken about the properties of jewels and glasses. I knew that such things were much used for prophecy and various forms of lithomancy; but as to whether I could procure one, and whether it could be ground into a camera lens, I was not at all certain.

Still, I spoke to Isaac Voorden. He was the logical person to go to. His antique shop down on South Kinnikinnic, pervaded by an aura of mysticism, was a little fortress that preserved the past. Isaac Voorden made a profession of his hobby and a hobby of his profession; he lived on metaphysics and dabbled in antiques. He spent the greater portion of his time in the musty back rooms of his establishment, and left the care of his shop to a clerk.

Here in the rear of the place he had relics of other days which made his commercial antiques seem bright and new by contrast. The centuried symbols of magic, alchemy, and the secret sciences fascinated Voorden; he had gathered unto himself a collection of statuettes, talismans, fetiches and other paraphernalia of wizardry that would have been hard to match.

It was from Isaac, then, that I expected help in my quest, and he gave it to me. I told my story of Niles' photographic problems. The sallow-faced, thin-lipped little antique-dealer listened, his eyebrows crawling over his forehead like astonished black beetles.

"Very interesting," he said, when I had concluded. His rasping voice and preoccupied manner betokened

the introverted pedant—Isaac always seemed to be delivering a lecture to himself.

"Very, very interesting," he repeated. "David Niles has had illustrious predecessors. The priests of Ishtar sought in their Mysteries to peer beyond the veil, and they looked through crystals. The first crude telescopes of Egypt were fashioned by men who sought to use them in seeing beyond the stars and unlocking the gates of the Infinite. The Druids contemplated pools of water, and the mad emperors sought the Heavenly Stairway in China, hoping to ascend by gazing at turning rubies whilst under the influence of drugs.

"Yes, your friend Niles has an age-old wish, and expresses it in a timeless fashion. It is the wish that animated Appolonius, and Paracelsus, and the absurd, posturing Cagliostro. Men have always sought to see the Infinite; to walk between the worlds—and sometimes that wish has been granted."

I cut in. Voorden was wound up for the afternoon, but I wanted my information.

"They say there are jewels that hold queer visions," I murmured. Unconsciously, I adopted Voorden's pomposity of speech. He smiled, slowly.

"I have them here," he replied.

"Niles does not believe that," I countered.

"Many do not believe. But there is a stone once used by Friar Bacon, and a set of crystals which intrigued Theophrastus, and divining-jewels that the Aztecs peered through before the blood-sacrifice. Jewels, you know, are mathematical figures of light—they reflect within their facets. And who knows but that in some way those angles impinge on other worlds? Perhaps they reach out and transmute poly-angularity so that gazing into their depths, we become aware of it three-dimensionally. The ancients used angles in magic; the moderns do the same thing and call it mathematics. De Sitter says—"

"The jewel for the camera lens," I interrupted.

"I am sorry, my friend. Of course.

I think I have one that should prove eminently suitable. The Star of Sechmet. Very ancient, but not costly. Stolen from the crown of the Lioness-headed Goddess during a Roman invasion of Egypt. It was carried to Rome and placed in the vestal girdle of the High-Priestess of Diana. The barbarians took it, cut the jewel into a round stone. The black centuries swallowed it.

"But it is known that Axenos the Elder bathed it in the red, yellow and blue flames, and sought to employ it as a Philosopher's Stone. With it he was reputed to have seen beyond the Veil and commanded the Gnomes, the Sylphs, the Salamanders, and the Undines. It formed part of the collection of Gilles De Rais, and he was said to have visioned within its depths the concept of *Homunculus*. It disappeared again, but a monograph I have mentions it as forming part of the secret collection of the Count St. Germain during his ritual services in Paris. I bought it in Amsterdam from a Russian priest whose eyes had been burned out by little gray brother Rasputin. He claimed to have divinated with it and foretold—"

I broke in again at this point. "You will cut the stone so that it may be used as a photographic lens, then," I repeated. "And when shall I have it?"

"You young men have no love for quiet conversation," he rebuked me. "Tomorrow, if you like. You understand, the jewel has only a great sentimental value to me; I have never experimented with it personally. All that I ask is that you report to me your findings with it. And I counsel you that if the camera reveals what I think it will, you promise to take care in using it. There is danger in invading the realms—"

He was still chattering away as I bowed out. Great character, Isaac.

THE following afternoon I called and took the little package which he proffered me.

That evening I gave it to Niles.

Together we unwrapped the cloudy lens. I had given Voorden the specifications of the large camera we ordinarily employed in our later work—

a reflex, with a reflecting mirror set inside so that we could easily peer through and view the focus. Voorden had done his work amazingly well—Niles gave a little snort of astonishment before he commented, "Nice job."

He lost no time in changing the lenses and inserting the Star of Sechmet. He bent over the camera—I shall never forget the sight of him there—and his plump body loomed large against the shadowed walls of the studio. I thought of a stooping alchemist peering into a crystal to seek instructions from the demons that danced within.

Niles jerked erect with a grunt. "The devil!" he muttered. "It's all cloudy. Can't make any adjustment. The whole thing's a fake."

"Let me try."

I took my place and stared through a gray mass. Yes, it was merely a dull lens. Or was it?

A hint of movement in the cloudy gray.

A swirling, as of parted mists. A dancing light. The fog was dispersing, and it seemed to be opening up—opening to a view that receded far into the distance. The wall it was focused on appeared faintly, very tiny, as though through the reverse end of binoculars. The wall began to fade, so that I thought of a ghost room, with ectoplasmic lines. Then it fled away, and something new loomed large before the camera. Something grew out of empty space. Abruptly—focus!

I think I shouted. Certainly a scream seared across my brain.

For I saw Hell.

At first only angles and angles, weaving and shifting in light that was of no color, yet phosphorescent. And out of the angles, a flat black plain that stretched upward, endlessly, without horizon. It was moving, and the angles moved, and yet through the lurching roll as of a ship's deck in heavy seas, I saw cubes, triangles, mathematical figures of bewildering size and complexity. There were thousands of them, lines of light in the shape of polyhedrons. And as I gazed, they *changed*.

Changed into forms.

Those forms—they were spawned only in delirium; only in nightmare and dreams of the Pit. There were grinning demons that skulked on padding paws across that endless moving plain; there were shapeless toadstools with tentacles ending in Cyclopean eyes; there were fanged heads that rolled towards me, laughing; great hands that curled and crawled like mad spiders. Ghouls, monsters, fiends—the words sprang to my consciousness. And a moment ago they had been mathematical figures!

"Here," I gasped. "Look again, Niles."

HE gazed, his face reflecting puzzlement at my agitation. "Still nothing," he grumbled. But watching him I saw the pallor come into his face as he stared more intently.

"Yes!" he hissed. "The mist parting. Yes! The room is smaller, fading. And now—something is rushing up or I'm rushing toward it—angles of light."

"Wait," I said in a low voice, yet triumphantly. "You haven't seen anything yet."

"I see geometrical shapes. Cubic shapes. Polyhedrons of luminance. They cover a plain and— Good God!" His body shook over the camera.

"I see them!" he cried. "I see them. Dozens of tall, eyeless creatures with heads all hair. Knotted hair, it twists and weaves, and underneath the hair, little wrinkled pink-pulp mouths like the convolution slits of the human brain. And that—the *Goat with the Hands!*"

He made an indescribable sound, fell back shaking, and turned the adjusting device. His eyes were red, he looked as though he had awakened from a fever-sleep.

We each had a drink. We didn't trouble about glasses, we drank from the bottle.

"Well?" I said, when composure had been restored.

"Hallucination," he hazarded, somewhat weakly.

"Want to look again?" I countered. He gave me a wry smile.

"It can't be delusion," I went on. "I didn't see any goat, but we both saw the mists swirl, saw the same plane, the same geometric forms of living light."

"True. But the last—things—were different to each of us. I don't understand."

"I think I do," I said. "If Voorden is right. That jewel is a key. Its angles open to the Astral Plane. The Astral Plane—here, don't shake your head so—corresponds to the scientific conception of the Fourth Dimension, although metaphysicians believe it is an extension of third-dimensional life. That is, when men die their souls enter the Astral Plane and pass through it into another higher form of existence on a higher dimension. The Astral Plane is a sort of No Man's Land existing all about us, where lost souls, and lower entities that have never achieved life, wander forever in a sort of Limbo."

"Hooey."

"A modern criticism. But it's an ancient belief, mirrored in a thousand forms in scores of religions. And wait until you see what I'm getting at. Ever hear of Elementals?"

"Nothing but a few mentions. Ghosts, aren't they?"

"No—forces. Entities not human, but linked with humanity. They are the *demons* and the *familiars* and the *incubæ* and the *genie* of all religions; the beings that exist invisibly around us and seek traffic with men. Organisms outside three-dimensional life, if you want it in more scientific terminology. They inhabit another Time-field, another space continuum that is nevertheless synchronized and co-existent with our own. They can be viewed, or reached, as ultra-dimensional inhabitants, only through angles. The angles, the facets of this jewel, enabled us to see through to them. They establish a focal point with infinity. What we saw, then, are Elementals."

"All right, *swami*, but why did we see different creatures?" he persisted.

"Because, my dear fellow, we have different brains. At first we both saw geometrical figures. That is the purest form of life they exist in."

"But our minds interpreted these figures into familiar shapes. I saw one type of monstrosity because of my background of mythological study. You received another impression—and I gather from your little comments (you look smug enough now, friend, but you were bleating pretty loudly a while ago and I know you were genuinely impressed) that you drew your images from past dreams and nightmares. I should imagine that a Hungarian peasant, peering through the lens, would see vampires and werewolves.

IT'S psychological. In some way that jewel establishes a focal point in more than a visual way. It must also enable those creatures to become aware of us—and they *will* that we see them according to our mental concepts of such entities. In fact, that's how superstition probably originated; these beings at times communicated with men."

Niles made a gesture of impatience. "Dropping the psychological and the nut-house angle for a minute," he said, "I certainly must hand it to your friend Voorden. Whether his story about the jewel is hokum or not, and whether your rather naive explanation is accepted or disbelieved, I still can see that we've stumbled on something quite marvelous. I mean it. The pictures we can take with that camera will be unique in the field. I've never read of any experimental work that even approached this. It goes beyond the wildest Dadaistic or Surrealistic concepts. We'll get actual photographs—but of what, I'll be darned if I can foretell. Your so-called mental concepts were different from mine."

I shook my head as something that Voorden had said came back to me.

"Now look here, Niles. I know you don't believe me, but you believe what you saw in the lens. I saw you shudder; you must admit the horror of those creatures—whether you choose to think they originate in your imagination or in my theory of the Astral Plane, you must recognize the fact that they are a menace to any man's sanity.

"If you see too much of that sort of thing you'll go mad. I'm not being melodramatic. I wouldn't advise looking too closely into that lens, now, or spending too much time before it."

"Don't be silly," Niles said.

"Elementals," I persisted—and you must believe this—yearn for life. They are cosmic ghouls, feeding on dead soul-bodies; but they long to lure a living man through the planes to them. Consider all legend—it's merely allegory. Stories of men disappearing, selling their souls to the devil, going to foreign worlds; all are founded on the idea of Elementals seeking human prey and dragging men down to their plane."

"Cut it out, it annoys me." Niles was colloquially common in his speech, but his eyes betokened a slight credulity that grew as I ignored his skepticism.

"You say it's superstition," I went on. "I say it's science. Witches, wizards, so-called wonder-workers; the wise men whose secrets built the pyramids—they all employed spells in which they used what? Geometrical figures. They drew angles and pentagons and cabalistic circles. Through the lines they summoned the forces from the Astral Plane—or the outer Dimensions. These forces granted them boons, and in turn they finally were drawn along the angles themselves into the Astral Plane, to pay for the boon with their lives. Witchcraft and geometry are strange bedfellows, but it's historical fact.

"And so I warn you. You see creatures through the jewel lens, and they see, feel, are in some way aware, of you. They will seek your soul—and just as you can look through the lens at them, they can extend their forces back through the jewel to suck you down. Hypnotic force, of some sort psychology has not yet postulated. Magnetism, telepathy; these are the words psychologists use to describe things they do not fully understand; just as the ancients called such forces magic. Don't look too long or too closely through that jewel."

Niles laughed.

"Tomorrow I'll take the pictures," he declared. "And then we'll see just what your Elementals are like. If it makes you nervous, you can stay away."

"Frankly, I will," I said.

And I did.

The following afternoon I left the studio in Niles' hands. He was tremendously excited. He spoke of using new focusing adjustments to extend part of the field; he wondered what speeds to photograph with, what paper to use for printing. He also speculated as to whether or not the creatures he saw would appear on the finished negative, or merely the amazing light-figures. I left, for I felt growing nervousness and apprehension I did not wish him to see.

I went down to Voorden's.

THE shop was open, but the clerk was not there when I passed through the front of the place, although the bell tinkled its usual warning of a customer's approach as I entered the door. I walked back through the gloom to the room where Isaac usually spent his time in study.

He was sitting there in the soft haze peculiar to the lightless chamber; his eyes glazed in rapt attention on the open pages of some old book.

"Isaac," I said. "That jewel has something. Niles and I used it last night, and I think it's a gateway to something incredible. Those diviners of ancient times were no fools. They knew what they were doing—"

Isaac never moved. Imperturbable, he sat and stared through the quiet dusk. There was a little smile on his sallow face.

"You promised to look up some more of the jewel's history," I went on. "Did you find anything? It's amazing, you know; quite amazing."

Isaac sat and stared and smiled. I bent forward.

Sitting bolt upright in his chair, hand clutching a pen, Isaac Voorden, seemed a modern necromancer.

And like many an ancient necro-

mancer who had overstepped the pale, Isaac Voorden was dead.

Stone-dead.

"Isaac!" I shouted. Funny, isn't it, how people always shout the name of the departed upon discovery of death? It's a sort of despairing wail of disbelief at a friend's passing; an invocation, as though the echo of human voice can recall the soul of one that has passed beyond. Beyond—to the Astral Plane?

Quickly I bent over the cold body, stared at the crabbed scrawl covering the paper. I read the notes Voorden had been working on when his pale Visitor had arrived.

They blurred through my brain.

"The Star of Sechmet. Ptolemaic. Aug. Lulla, name of Roman who stole it. See note in Veno's *History*. Lulla died under curse for removing sacred jewel. Point one.

"Priestess of Diana who wore it in vestal girdle also died. For sacrilege. Again, see Veno. Point two. The pattern grows.

"Gilles De Retz—his fate is known. He misused the jewel. Yes, it's the inevitable story of violation—"

"See *Mysteries of the Worm* for Prinn's chapter on divination. Might be reference concerning jewel during its disappearance.

"Again, the Russian. Claims to have stolen jewel from Rasputin, who used it in prophecy. Rasputin dead. The Russian lost his eyes. And unless he lost his reason, his warnings concerning sacred character of the jewel are to be respected. Points three, four, and five. Whoever or whatever exists in the world opened up by the jewel is not anxious to have the gateway changed, or misused. Cutting the stone, transplanting it from one setting to another, misusing it—all result in death.

"And—I have done all three. God help this man Niles for what he must endure. They may get at him through the stone.

"God help me. There will be a price I must pay; soon.

"Why didn't I think before I gave up the jewel? Now I'm—"

That was all he had written. There

was no scrawling off of the interrupted pen, no frozen look of horror, no "mounting dread" in the text of the writing. Voorden had written it. One minute he was alive, and the next minute he was dead.

Of course it could have been heart-failure, thrombosis, or simply old age. Shock, excitement, anxiety might have brought it on; a stroke may have done it.

BUT I didn't fool myself. I knew. I rose and ran from that shop as though fiends dogged my heels. And all the way my legs worked in rhythm to a single phrase racing through my brain. "God help Niles."

It was dusk when I unlocked the studio door. The studio was empty, the twilight room darkened. Had Niles gone out?

I prayed so. But where would he go? He wouldn't abandon work. I walked to where the camera loomed; noted the exposure of one film. He must have been called.

I restrained an impulse to peer again through the jewel lens, as I lit the light. No—I did not wish to see that plain again; see those horrible figures dwelling outside laws of space and time, yet—mocking thoughts!—actually existing here around me, in this very room. World's within worlds of horror. Where was Niles?

I couldn't brood like this. Why not develop the exposed film? Keep busy. I carried the camera into the dark-room. Ten minutes in darkness, then the regular process. I set the fans going as I hung the dark square up to dry.

My mind teemed with excited conjectures. Would we find a blank photograph? Would it show the angled figures of light? Or would—wonderful possibility—the creatures conjured up by our imaginations appear? Would our own brains aid in taking the pictures, as a part of the focal point linked to the camera by the hypnotic jewel? It was a fascinating thought.

The fans hummed as the minutes fled.

But where was Niles? Whatever had caused his hasty departure, sure-

ly he would have returned by now. And he had left no note.

The door had been locked from outside, and I had the only key.

The thought grinned at me through a wave of horror.

There was no way Niles could have left.

Only one way.

I jammed the dried negative into the printer, with a sheet of ordinary paper.

I pressed down, slipped the print into the developer; waited a moment.

I raced out into the light of the other room, held the finished print, wet and dripping, to the light.

Then I screamed, and smashed that camera, stamped on the jewel until I could control myself sufficiently to pick it up and hurl it through the open window at the further rooftops. I tore print and negative to shreds. And still I screamed, for I could not and never shall be able to erase the memory of what I had seen in that picture Niles had taken.

He must have clicked it off at a very fast speed. Very fast. And perhaps it was the actual working of the camera which accounted for what had happened. It might have established the focal point instantaneously—established it so that those things—forces, Elementals, call them what you will—could achieve their goal.

I saw the print. It was as Niles guessed it might be; a picture of a black endless plain. Only there were no lights visible, no figures, nothing except black shadows that seemed to blur around a central point. *They* did not photograph.

But *they* blurred around a point—a central point. *They* got through just as the picture must have snapped, yet faster than light itself. *They* got through and drew Niles along the angles as I had feared. Faster than light itself, as I have said. For it had to be faster, else I would not have seen—I would not have seen what I did see on that print. The central point. . . .

The central point of that accursed picture; the only visible thing amidst the shadows—*was the dead and mangled body of David Niles!*



Major McCrary
saw into the
future

Major McCrary's Vision

*To Kill or Not to Kill—That Is the Question as Time
Stands Still to Give a Man the Answer!*

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "Liquid Life," "A Month a Minute," etc.

AT about 5:30 o'clock on the afternoon of Monday, July 13, 1863, Major Terence McCrary, U.S.A., was walking quietly along Second Avenue, New York City, between 34th and 35th Streets.

He felt perfectly contented and happy. True, the Civil War wasn't going as well as might be. The Confederates had just staged an invasion of Pennsylvania, which had even threatened Philadelphia. But this was no business of Major McCrary's.

He was not responsible for affairs going on at the front. His duty was at a desk in the office of the District

Quartermaster of New York City.

His own work was going well, and he had recently been commended for his efficiency. Furthermore, he had just read in today's *Tribune* that the invaders were withdrawing, after a Federal victory at Hagerstown, following close on the heels of Gettysburg.

The only cloud on his particular horizon was the draft riots. The ninth district conscription-office had been wrecked that morning, and a number of Army officers had been threatened with violence during the day.

But McCrary himself had promptly drawn a cavalry revolver from the local Ordnance stores; he was a crack shot, and furthermore he had sufficient confidence in the dignity of his rank to discount the idea that any thug or draft-dodger would dare to assault him—a Major of the Quartermaster Corps of the U.S. Army.

On this warm summer afternoon, as he absentmindedly plodded along up Second Avenue, his thoughts were of wife and children.

"Hey, you Army scum!" sang out an uncouth and belligerent voice.

McCrary looked up. Several rough-necks, with sticks in their hands, were standing some ten feet in front of him on the sidewalk.

McCrary halted. One of the bums, stooping over, scooped up a fistful of mud from the gutter, let fly with it. It struck him on the chest, spattering all over his immaculate blue uniform.

The veins swelled purple in McCrary's throat; he clenched his fists. But all the officers on duty in New York had that day been warned to avoid any acts which might start a riot. So McCrary choked down his Irish wrath, and sought to avoid the mob by crossing the street.

With a whoop of derision, they charged upon him, surrounding him in the middle of the thoroughfare. The major halted, began to argue with them, as peacefully and as diplomatically as he could.

The hoodlums howled him down. "Bloody Republican!" they shouted. "Murderer!" They barred his way, showered him with unprintable oaths.

Still the Army officer kept his temper. He had his orders; he must avoid provoking a riot.

Yet a man could stand so much and no more. When one of the largest and most brutal-looking of the mob rushed at him with upraised club, McCrary abruptly decided that affairs had gone too far for any hope of peaceful settlement; so he reached to his hip and grasped the butt of his cavalry revolver; prepared to yank it from its holster and defend himself.

At that very moment . . . just as

his fingers closed around the grip of his weapon . . . something . . . something very strange happened . . .

Everything around Major McCrary came to a sudden and complete stop. If the year had been 1938, instead of 1863, the phenomenon would have suggested to his mind the sticking of a motion-picture film in the projector. Events which had been flowing along so smoothly and rhythmically, suddenly stuck and became a flat scene without motion.

THE club of the advancing rioter hung poised in mid-air; the rioter himself abruptly froze, in a running position, with one foot on the ground and the other one lifted in front of him.

It was a position from which he would have fallen forward on his face—but the attraction of gravitation no longer operated—it too had stopped, along with everything else.

The shifting surrounding crowd about McCrary and his attacker still surrounded but shifted no longer. The hot afternoon breeze no longer blew against McCrary's cheek. The fleecy clouds overhead had ceased their lazy drift across the blue—had ceased even to change their shapes.

A sea-gull, high aloft, flapped no more; remained fixed upon the sky. As a ludicrous touch, a large horse-fly, buzzing a minute before around the major's head, now hung a few inches in front of his nose, not a quiver coming from its formerly vibrating wings. The major himself was a frozen tableau of a man drawing a revolver.

Time had stopped stock-still! Nothing moved except the major's thoughts. And as he gradually took in the situation, as he slowly recovered from his stupefaction, he saw a white-robed winged figure approaching down the street.

Just beyond edges of the now motionless mob, the figure stopped and called softly, "Terence McCrary, come with me."

For McCrary—for McCrary alone, the spell was broken. Letting his revolver slide back into its holster, the major wormed his way out be-

"Come," replied the winged figure. And reaching out one hand, she laid it on the major's shoulder, led him to the curb, across the sidewalk, and through an open doorway. Every-

"A 'motion picture'. There are no such things yet in this world; but in the future, in the twentieth century, men will perfect them. They will be like a magic-lantern, a stereopticon, except that the pictures will

"Those devices of the future will be nothing compared to what you are about to see," asserted his companion. "For I shall show you a

newsreel of *things which have not yet occurred*. Men will never attain to that. Now watch and listen."

As she ceased speaking, the square on the screen in front of them began to flicker, soft music came from somewhere in the room, and some printed words danced upon the space blank but a moment before.

Wide-eyed, the major read: "The Fatal Shot, featuring Major Terence McCrary, Q.M.C., U.S. Army."

The musical prelude stopped, the printed announcement flashed off, and McCrary gasped to see a colored action-picture of himself, in his blue uniform, surrounded by the anti-draft rioters in the street outside.

The scene was exactly as it had been just before Time had stopped. Not only could the major see the scene, but he could hear all the sounds which had accompanied it: his own peaceful words, the taunts and gibes of the mob.

Then the burly hoodlum raised his club and rushed at the figure in blue, just as he had done outside.

At this point in the film, McCrary expected to see everything come to a standstill, as it had actually done. To his surprise, the action went on.

The Army officer in the picture snatched out his revolver—snatched it so quickly that the film scarcely recorded the movement—and fired point-blank at the oncoming thug.

An expression of surprise flooded the face of the rioter. His club clattered to the pavement. With a gurgling groan, he sank to his knees; then pitched forward in a heap.

"Next!" exclaimed the officer on the screen tersely.

The mob fell back, snarling. There were no takers to the hero's invitation. "Scatter!" he tersely ordered them, raising his smoking weapon; the mob promptly scattered.

The McCrary of the film disdainfully returned his revolver to its holster; without a glance behind him at his thoroughly cowed enemies, or at the corpse of the man he had killed, he marched to the sidewalk, moved along it toward his home.

The scene shifted back to the street again, where the mob, with

swearing and many threats, picked up the dead body and bore it away.

THERE followed next the hero's welcome to the arms of his wife and children. Then a humorous touch: the spotted uniform being cleaned by the major's Negro serving man, with much excited comment by the gathered servants.

Sub-title: "The Next Morning."

McCrary saw his screen replica seated at his desk at the Q.M. storehouse. An orderly entered, saluted and presented a summons from headquarters. The hero went there. The colonel in charge gravely informed him that the rioting was fast becoming uncontrollable, that the mobs were deifying the slain thug, and that it had become necessary to recall troops from the front in order to patrol the city.

"You are under arrest, McCrary," said the colonel. "Charges will be preferred against you for shooting, without provocation, an unarmed civilian, and for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman."

"But, Colonel—"

"Silence!" bellowed his superior, and he was led away.

Then, successively flashing upon the screen, scenes showed the return of many troops from Gettysburg to restore order in New York, the frantic consternation of the populace in both New York and Philadelphia. The New Yorkers were afraid that not enough troops would be recalled to restore order and suppress the draft-riots. The Philadelphians were afraid that too many troops would be recalled, allowing Lee and his retreating Southern Army to turn back and again invade Pennsylvania.

The populace of both cities—in fact, of the country at large—demanded a scapegoat; the harassed officials had no trouble finding one.

Major Terence McCrary had killed a civilian, and the event had intensified the draft-riots. The riots had necessitated weakening General Meade's Union Army by sending troops to New York. The fate of the nation hung in the balance as the result of McCrary's rash act.

Major McCrary had to be punished.

There followed the convening of a General Court-martial to try the culprit. With popular feeling inflamed as it was, McCrary never had a chance.

The verdict was "guilty as charged." The sentence, dishonorable dismissal from the Army.

The film then showed the barely successful termination of the Civil War, with a flashback to the disgraced McCrary after each event.

He was shown filling one civilian job after another; filling them satisfactorily, only to be discharged from each as soon as his identity as "Butcher McCrary" became known.

His family was shown moving into successively less and less livable quarters, finally ending up in a slum.

The last view of McCrary himself was as a white-wing, with scoop and push-brush, picking up manure in the streets of post-war New York.

The prophetic news-reel came to an end. The living major sat quietly, staring ahead of him. At last he said: "And what if I do *not* shoot?"

"I was waiting for you to ask that," replied the angel. "Look again and see."

Once more the film began, with the same musical prelude and the same title: "The Fatal Shot, featuring Major Terence McCrary, Q.M.C., U.S. Army."

But when it reached the scene where the thug, with club upraised, rushed upon the blue-coated Army officer, the action changed.

With a smile on his lips—shown in a close-up—the officer folded his arms, looked his assailant coolly in the eye . . . and was felled to the cobble-stones!

With loud laughter, the mob dragged the prostrate form to the gutter, beat it with clubs, kicked it.

Exhausted at last, they stopped. The blue-coated body stirred.

"Water!" came a faint moan.

A kindly-faced man in a white coat emerged from a nearby drug store with a tumbler in his hand. Eagerly the stricken figure raised its head. But the glass was dashed from the druggist's hand. The mob

wrecked the drug store. All attempts to rescue the fallen man were repulsed by the mob. Occasionally a passerby would give the body a contemptuous kick. The body typified the hated draft.

A LONG toward dusk, there came two priests with a dump-cart. The mob grudgingly let them through, and they tenderly carried the stricken man away to a hospital, where later he died, surrounded by his family.

Overnight the dead major became a national hero. The riots were promptly and vigorously suppressed. President Lincoln was shown writing a long-to-be-treasured letter of condolence to the major's proud widow. A popular subscription was taken up to educate his children, who were taught to know that "father gave his life for his country."

The second film ended. "Choose!" commanded the winged figure.

There was a long moment of silence. Then: "I have chosen," Major McCrary said softly.

His celestial guide led him forth again into the street.

The scene remained unchanged. The clouds still hung motionless in the blue. The group of figures, that had been the mob, continued to await their victim in frozen silence.

Right through their midst the winged guide led the major, until she had placed him exactly as he had stood when Time had stopped. His hand was on the butt of his revolver. The horse-fly hung motionless in front of his nose. The impending figure of the rioter stood with upraised club. "Good-by and good luck," said his guide. She moved away up the street, was gone.

For a moment Major McCrary stood immovable. Then, with a sigh and a slight shudder, he let his pistol slip back into his holster. He raised his arms and folded them proudly across his breast.

Time started moving again. The club of the rioter crashed down upon the skull of his unresisting victim.

The rest is history.

(See the *New York Tribune* of July 15, 1863, and *Harper's Weekly* of Aug. 1, 1863.)

*Ghosting Out of the Dismal North Swamp, a Batrachian
Horror Howls Through Monk's Hollow in
a Witch's Holocaust!*



*The thing kept at
Hartley's heels,
giving him no
chance to double
back*

THE FROG

By HENRY KUTTNER

Author of "Lord of the Lions," "The Unresting Dead," etc.

NORMAN HARTLEY knew little about the black legends which clustered about Monk's Hollow, and cared less. Hidden in a secluded valley in the eastern hills, the ancient town had lain dreaming for generations, and a quaint and unpleasantly morbid folklore had sprung up from the tales the oldsters whispered about the

days when witches had worked detestable sorceries in the festering North Swamp, a region which even yet was shunned by the villagers.

Monstrous things had dwelt in that stagnant morass long ago, they said, and the Indians had had good cause to name it the Forbidden Place. The witches had passed, and their terrible books had been burnt,

their curious implements destroyed.

But the dark lore had come down furtively through the generations, and there were still some who could remember the night when, summoned by agonized shrieks, men had broken into half-witted old Betsy Codman's cottage and found her still-quivering body dangling in a Witch's Cradle.

Norman Hartley, however, saw in Monk's Hollow only a quiet, lonely little village where he might find the privacy which had been impossible in New York. Convivial friends were continually bursting into his studio, and instead of working on his canvases Hartley would find himself visiting the night clubs.

His work had suffered. In the ancient, gambreled house he had rented, two miles from the village, he felt that he could recapture the inspiration that had made his paintings famous.

BUT the Witch Stone bothered him.

It was a roughly chiseled block of gray stone, perhaps three feet high and two feet square, which stood in the flower garden behind the house. Hartley's sense of artistic values was outraged every time he looked out of his window at the stone.

Dobson, the caretaker, had tried to train the flowers so as to shield it from sight; he had planted creepers about it, but the ground was apparently sterile. There was a little clearing of bare brown soil about the Witch Stone where nothing grew—not even weeds.

Dobson said it was because of Persis Winthrop, but Dobson was superstitious and a fool.

Whether Persis Winthrop actually lay buried beneath the stone or not, the fact remained that the block was an eyesore. One's gaze passed casually over the gay colors of the garden, drawn irresistibly by the little barren clearing where the stone stood. Hartley, to whom beauty was almost a religion, found himself becoming irritated whenever his eyes rested on the Witch Stone.

Finally he told Dobson to move

it. The old caretaker, his seamed brown face puckered with apprehension, scraped his wooden leg across the floor and demurred.

"It don't do no harm," he said, giving Hartley a sideways glance out of watery blue eyes. "Besides, it's a sort of landmark."

"Look here," Hartley said, unreasonably annoyed. "If I'm renting this house I've a right to move the stone out of the way if I don't like it. And I don't—it's like a great ugly splotch of green in a sunset. It throws the garden out of symmetry. I can't understand you, Dobson. One would think you were afraid to touch it." Hartley's thin, studious face was flushed.

Dobson shifted uneasily. "Well, sir, they do say—my granddad told me they put the stone there for a reason."

Hartley snorted, but the caretaker went on seriously. "I mind he told me once old Persis cursed Monk's Hollow when they were ducking her in the pond. And they couldn't drown her, either—not with the father she had, that came out of the North Swamp one night to—"

"Oh, for God's sake," Hartley said disgustedly. "So if the stone is moved she'll pop up, eh?"

Dobson caught his breath. "You shouldn't say things like that, Mr. Hartley. Persis Winthrop was a witch—everybody knows that. There used to be awful things going on in this house when she lived here."

Hartley turned away. They were standing in the garden and he moved aside to examine the stone.

There were curious marks upon it, seemingly chiseled by inexperienced hands. The rough figures had a vague resemblance to Arabic, but Hartley could make nothing of them. He heard Dobson stump up beside him.

"He said—my granddad—that when they were ducking her they had to get the women folks away. She came up out of the water all green and slimy, with her great mouth croaking out spells to nobody knows what heathen gods—"

Hartley looked up quickly at the

sound of a motor. A truck was chugging into view around the bend of the road. He glanced at the Witch Stone, and then, making up his mind, hastily sprinted for the road. Behind him he heard Dobson muttering some obscure reference to Persis Winthorp's mysterious father.

The truck was loaded with gravel. He flagged it, and as it ground to a halt swung himself on the running board.

"I wonder if you'd do a little job for me," he said to the two men in the truck. "I want to get a good-sized rock out of my garden, and it's a bit too heavy for me to handle. It'll only take a minute." He pulled out his wallet.

The driver, an unshaved, bull-necked Irishman, turned inquiringly to his companion, exchanged glances with him, and then grinned at Hartley. "Sure, buddy. Glad to oblige."

"Good," Hartley said, and, half to himself: "We can dump it under a bush, out of sight."

LATER, Hartley stood by his window, frowning. The moon was rising beyond the ridge, but the garden was still in shadow. Somehow he had the impression that something had moved in that dim black sea of gloom. Crickets were shrilling monotonously, and he felt unreasonably nervous. From below came a recurrent tap and shuffle as Dobson puttered about the kitchen.

Dobson would have to do something about that barren spot in the garden. It was even more noticeable now that the stone had been removed, and even in the gloom Hartley fancied he could see a deeper shadow where the Witch Stone had stood.

What was the old legend? Dobson had hysterically poured it out as the truck-drivers were lifting the stone, pleading with them to replace it, begging Hartley to relent. It was full of monstrous hints of the obscure traffic Persis Winthorp had had with the abnormal beings that dwelt in the North Swamp, and in particular her dealings with the batrachoid creature who had sired

her—a demon whom the Indians had worshiped ages ago, Dobson said.

The villagers could not kill her, but there were spells which could nullify her evil magic, and there were words of power that could keep her fettered in her grave—words such as those which were chiseled upon the Witch Stone, the caretaker protested, fear contorting his face into a brown, wrinkled mask.

In Monk's Hollow they said—and his voice sank to a tremulous whisper—that in the grave, Persis had grown more like her unknown father. And now that Hartley was moving the Witch Stone—

Hartley lit a cigarette, frowning down into the enigmatic gloom of the garden. Either Dobson was mentally unbalanced, or—there was some logical reason for his interest in that particular spot in the garden. Perhaps—

The thought flashed into Hartley's mind, and he chuckled suddenly. Of course! He should have known! Dobson must be something of a miser—indeed, Hartley had already encountered more than one instance of his penury—and his hoard must have been buried beneath the Witch Stone.

What more logical place to hide it—the grave of the ill-famed old witch, shunned by the superstitious country folk?

Well, it served the old fellow right, Hartley thought unkindly. Trying to frighten his employer with a cock-and-bull story about a witch-woman who was supposed still to be alive—

With a sharp exclamation Hartley bent forward, peered out of the window. There was something moving in the garden—a blacker shadow in the gloom. He could not make out its form, but it seemed to be moving very slowly in the direction of the house.

Suddenly he realized that the sound of Dobson's movements below had ceased. The wooden leg was no longer thumping on the kitchen floor. With the realization Hartley grinned, half minded to throw up the window and shout at the care-

taker. Good Lord! Did the fellow think Hartley was trying to steal his few pennies?

Hartley told himself that Dobson was old, crochety, but nevertheless Hartley felt a little surge of irritation mount within him.

The black shadow was coming closer to the house. Hartley strained his eyes, but could make out no more than a dim, oddly squat outline. For a moment he wondered whether Dobson, for some insane reason, was crawling on his hands and knees.

The shadow scuttled swiftly for the house, was hidden from Hartley by the window-sill. He shrugged, crushed out his cigarette, and turned back to the book he had been reading.

Subconsciously he must have been waiting for some sound, for when the knock came he started, almost dropping the book. Someone had lifted and let fall the knocker on the front door.

HE waited. The sound was not repeated, but after a time he heard a furtive shuffling below, together with the tap-tapping of Dobson's wooden leg.

The book lay forgotten in his lap. To his straining ears came a preliminary scratching, then the tinkle of breaking glass. There was a faint rustling sound.

Hartley got up quickly. Had Dobson inadvertently locked himself out—and had he, after knocking at the door, broken a window to crawl back into the house? Somehow Hartley could not picture the rheumatic, crippled Dobson forcing himself through a window. Also, he had heard Dobson's footsteps *inside the house* just now.

Had the black shadow in the garden really been Dobson? Could it have been some prowler seeking entry? The two truck-drivers had eyed his fat wallet greedily when he had paid them. . . .

Then, blasting up from below, came a scream, knife-edged with terror, shrilling out harshly through the house. Hartley swore, leaped for the door. As he opened it he heard a

hurried rush of footsteps—Dobson's, for the tapping of the wooden leg was plainly audible.

But mingling with that sound was a puzzling scratching noise, as though of a dog's claws scraping across the floor. Hartley heard the back door open; the footsteps and the scraping ceased.

He took the stairway in three leaps.

As he burst into the kitchen the screaming began again, was cut off abruptly. There was a faint gurgling proceeding from beyond the open doorway that led into the garden. Hartley hesitated, snatched up a heavy carving-knife that lay on the table, and stepped quietly into the night.

The moon had risen higher, and in its wan light the garden looked ghostly, unearthly, save where the light from the doorway streamed out in a narrow path of yellow illumination. The night air was cool on his face. From his left, in the direction of the barren clearing where the Witch Stone had stood, came a faint rustling.

Hartley stepped quietly aside, vague apprehension mounting within him. Remembrance of Dobson's warning came flooding back, the caretaker's ominous insistence that the old witch had never died, that she lay waiting in her grave for someone to move the stone that held her fettered.

"Dobson," he called softly, and again: "Dobson!"

Something was moving toward him, very quietly, very stealthily.

The moonlight revealed a lumpy patch of shadow dragging itself forward. It was too bulky for a human being; besides, men do not emit harsh whistling sounds as they breathe, and *their backs are not fat and green and slimy. . . .*

Good God! What was this thing—this nightmare spawn of ancient horror that came leaping at Hartley out of the night? What blasphemous creature had been buried beneath the Witch Stone—and what dark forces had Hartley unknowingly unleashed?

They said that in the grave she had grown more like her unknown father.

Hartley reeled back against the house, mad horror battling with the rational beliefs of a lifetime. Such things could not exist—but it *did* exist! It was coming at him in great leaps, a misshapen shadow that glistened faintly in the moonlight. And dreadful menace was in its swift approach.

Already he had delayed too long. The thing was almost upon him as he turned to flee. His legs buckled, and for a frightful instant he thought that they would not support him, that he would sink helpless to the ground beneath the creature's onslaught. He staggered a few steps, heard the slobbering breathing almost on his neck, then gathered his strength and sprinted along the wall of the house.

The thing came after him. He doubled around the corner of the building and made for the road. As he gained it he chanced a swift look over his shoulder, and cold horror trailed icy fingers over his heart. It was still pursuing him.

Monk's Hollow! At the thought he turned and fled along the road toward the town, still clutching the carving-knife. He had forgotten it, but now, glancing down, he tightened his grip on the weapon and sprinted a bit faster. If he could only reach the village—

IT WAS two miles away—two endless miles of empty road, lonely and unfrequented, with little chance of an automobile passing. Few drivers chose this road; it was rutted and in disrepair; the new state highway was more direct.

But the highway lay beyond a ridge, and Hartley knew that he would stand no chance on rocky or uneven ground. Even on the road he had to watch carefully for the black shadows that betokened gaps and ruts in the surface. Behind him something came leaping, and there was a sound of rasping, heavy breathing.

The night was cold, but sweat

burst out on Hartley's face in great beads. His shirt was sodden. His lounging-robe impeded his running, and he slipped out of it. Behind him came a harsh, thick cry. There was a little scuffle, and then the rhythmic thuds were resumed.

"When they were ducking her they had to get the women folks away . . . she came up out of the water all green and slimy. . . ."

Hartley gritted his teeth, fought back an impulse to shriek his terror. Behind him came the steady *thud-thud*; and the stertorous breathing. The thing was gaining!

If he could only reach the village! He increased his pace, straining until the blood pounded in his temples. His efforts were useless. The thing behind him matched his pace; the thudding grew louder. Once he fancied he felt the creature's foul, hot breath on his neck. His chest was a raw flame; a knife-edge of agony burned his lungs; his breath whooped in and out.

He caught his foot in a rut and almost went headlong. With a wrenching effort he recovered his balance and fled on.

But the sounds of pursuit had grown loud—dreadfully loud. He wondered whether he might elude his pursuer by a quick dash into the thickets that lined the road—black blotches in the moonlight. No—the creature was too close. Hartley's mouth was gaping as he fought for breath.

Then he saw the light. Yellow squares that were windows in an oblong patch of blackness—but far, far distant. No—in the darkness he had misjudged—the house not fifty feet away. It loomed up suddenly before him.

He shrieked from a raw and throbbing throat as he raced for the porch.

But before he reached it he felt a heavy weight upon his back, bearing him to the ground; great talons were ripping at his shirt, raking his flesh with needle-sharp claws. His eyes and mouth were clogged with dirt, but he realized that he was still gripping the carving-knife.

Somehow he managed to reverse

it, stabbed up blindly over his shoulder. The slobbering, harsh breathing gave place to a frightful croaking yell, and then the knife was torn from his grasp. He struggled frantically to squirm free, but the great weight pinned him down inexorably.

A confused shouting came to his ears. He heard the crunching of quick footsteps, and the roar of a gun. Abruptly the weight was gone from his back; he heard something go thudding off into the darkness as he rolled over, scraping at the earth that encrusted his face. Out of smarting eyes he saw a man's pale face staring at him, a man who wore dusty overalls and held an old-fashioned musket in trembling hands.

Hartley discovered that he was sobbing.

The other man stared off into the shadows, looked back at Hartley with wide eyes. "Wh-what was it?" he asked shakily. "In God's name—what was it?"

* * * * *

Anam Pickering, whose tiny farm lay on the outskirts of Monk's Hollow, awoke with a start. He sat up in bed, fumbling on the bedside table for his glasses, his wrinkled face creased in puzzled lines. What had awakened him? Some unusual noise—

It came again—a furtive scratching beneath the window. The farmer, taken by surprise, started violently, and the glasses dropped to the carpet.

"Who's there?" he called sharply. There was no answer, but the scratching sound was repeated. There was another noise, too, a sound of thick, gasping breathing. Suddenly frightened, Anam cried, "Martha! Is that you, Martha?"

A bed creaked in the adjoining room. "Anam?" a thin voice called. "What's wrong?"

Anam got out of bed quickly and dropped to his knees beside the bed, fumbling for his spectacles. A sudden shattering of glass made him catch his breath sharply.

He looked up, but his dim eyes made out only a hazy rectangle—the window—against which a vague

black bulk loomed. An insidious odor came to his nostrils, and belatedly he straightened, his rheumatic limbs sending protesting twinges through him.

He heard a pattering of feet, and his sister's voice. "Anam? What—" The voice broke off, and there was a pause, frightful in its implication. Then above the scrambling and wheezing of the intruder the woman's scream skirled out, shrill and insane with utter terror.

A little moan of bewilderment came from Anam as he hesitated, peering around blindly. He made a tentative step and caromed into the bed, fell across it. He sensed rather than saw something, huge and black and shapeless, leap entirely over him and there was a heavy thud that shook the flimsy little farmhouse.

Martha had stopped screaming. She was making hoarse little rasping sounds deep in her throat, as though she were trying to cry out and couldn't. "Martha!" Anam shrieked. "Martha! For God's sake—"

There was a scurry of swift movement, and a low, oddly muzzled cry from the woman. Thereafter the only sound within the room was the thick, gulping breathing, and presently, as Anam lay half fainting across the bed, another sound, monstrous in the mad thoughts it called to the man's mind—a faint rending and tearing, as of flesh being rib-boned by sharp talons.

WHIMPING, Anam got to his feet. As he moved slowly across the room he repeated Martha's name under his breath, and his head swung from side to side as his dimmed vision tried to pierce the cryptic gloom. The tearing sound stopped abruptly.

Anam walked on. The harsh fabric of the carpet scratched his bare feet, and he was shivering violently. Still whispering Martha's name, he sensed a black bulk looming up before him. . . .

He touched something cold, slimy, with a sickening feel of loathsome fatness. He heard a frightful guttural snarl of bestial ferocity, some-

thing moved swiftly in the darkness—and death took Anam Pickering.

THUS horror came to Monk's Hollow. Like a foul breath of corruption from the generations of decadence in which the witch-town had brooded, a miasmic exhalation from the grave of Persis Winthorp lay like an ominous pall over the town.

When Hartley, accompanied by a dozen villagers, returned to his house in the morning, he found the flower garden trampled and ruined. The barren spot in the center of the garden had given place to a deep pit, in which, as though in ghastly mockery, lay a shocking conglomeration, the mutilated and partially devoured cadaver of old Dobson, recognizable only by the splintered remnant of the wooden leg.

The remains lay embedded in a foul-smelling pool of thick, greenish slime, and, although no one cared to approach that dreadful pit closely, the marks of gnawing on what was left of the peg leg were all too evident.

Hartley had recovered somewhat from his experience of the preceding night. Hours of nightmarish conjecture had led him through incredible labyrinths of fantasy to one inescapable conclusion, the stubborn belief that there was some logical, natural explanation of the horror.

To this view he clung, in spite of what he had seen the night before creeping toward him in the moonlit garden. The villagers could not know that Hartley dared not accept the monstrous theories which they had advanced during the trip to the witch-house, nor that Hartley held to his skepticism as the last bulwark of his sanity.

"I dare not believe," the artist told himself desperately. "Such things are impossible."

"An animal of some sort," he insisted, in answer to a comment by Byram Liggett, the stocky, bronze-faced farmer who had rescued him. "I'm sure of that. Some carnivorous animal—"

Liggett shook his head dubiously, his gun—for all the men had come fully armed—held in readiness as his

eyes furtively searched the surrounding vegetation. "No, sir," he said firmly. "Don't forget, I saw it. That thing wasn't like nothin' God ever created. It was—*her*—come up out of her grave."

Involuntarily the group shrank back from the charnel pit.

"All right, a—a hybrid, then," Hartley argued. "A sport—a freak. The product of a union between two different kind of animals. That's possible. It's simply a dangerous wild animal of unusual type—it must be!"

Liggett looked at him oddly, and was about to speak when there came an interruption in the person of a youth who ran panting up, white-faced and gasping.

A premonition of disaster came to Hartley. "What's happened?" he snapped, and the boy tried to control his hurried breathing until he could speak coherently.

"Ol' Anam—an' Miss Pickering," he gasped out at last. "Suthin's killed 'em! All—all tore to pieces they was—I saw 'em—"

At the memory a shudder shook the boy, and he began to cry from sheer terror.

THE men looked at one another with blanched faces, and a little murmur began, grew louder. Liggett raised his arms, quieted them. There were little beads of moisture on his brown face.

"We got to get back to town," he said tensely. "An' in a hurry, too. Our women-folks an' kids—"

As a thought came to him he turned again to the boy. "Jem," he asked sharply. "Did you notice—were there any tracks at Anam's place?"

The boy choked back his sobs. "There—yes, there was. Great big things, like frog tracks, only big as my head. They—"

The harsh, urgent voice of Liggett interrupted. "Back to town, everybody. Quick! Git your women an' younkers indoors, an' keep 'em there."

At his words the group broke and scattered, moving hastily away until

Liggett and Hartley were left. Hartley was very pale as he stared at the farmer.

"Surely this—this is unnecessary," he said. "A few men—with guns—"

"You damn fool!" Liggett snapped, his voice rough with restrained anger. "Movin' the Witch Stone—you shouldn't been 'lowed to rent the place anyway. Oh, you city folks are smart, I guess, with your talk o' freaks an'—an' *sports*—but what do you know 'bout what used to happen in Monk's Hollow hundreds o' years ago?"

"I've heard 'bout those times, when devils like Persis Winthorp had their conjurs an' pagan books here, an' I've heard tell o' the awful things that used to live in the North Swamp. You've done enough harm. You better come with me—you can't stay here. Nobody's safe till we do something 'bout—that!"

Hartley made no answer, but silently followed Liggett back to the road.

On their way they passed men hurrying townward, bent oldsters hobbling along, casting frightened glances about them, women with wide-eyed children whom they kept close about their skirts. A few automobiles drove slowly past, and a number of old-fashioned buggies. The telephones had been busy. Occasionally Hartley caught furtive whispers, and as they drew nearer town the number of fugitives increased, and the whispers grew and swelled into low, terror-laden mutterings, drumming into Hartley's ears like the doom-laden pounding of a great drum.

"The Frog! *The Frog!*"

Night came. Monk's Hollow lay sleeping in the moonlight. A number of grim, armed men patrolled the streets. Garage doors were left open, in instant readiness to rush aid in answer to a telephoned appeal for help. There must be no more tragedies like that of last night.

At two in the morning Liggett had been jerked from an uneasy sleep by the frantic ringing of the telephone. It was the proprietor of a gasoline station on the highway

several miles beyond the town. Something had attacked him, he shrieked into the instrument. He had locked himself within the station, but its glass walls would offer little protection against the thing that was even then creeping closer.

But help had arrived too late. The station was an inferno of flame that fed on the underground gasoline reservoirs, and the men had only a glimpse of a great misshapen thing that bounded from the holocaust to escape apparently unscathed amid the hail of hasty bullets that greeted its appearance.

But the proprietor of the station had, at least, died a clean death; he had been cremated, for some of his bones, unmarked by gnawing fangs, were later found among the ruins.

And that night Hartley had found monstrous tracks beneath the window of his room in Liggett's house. When he showed them to Liggett, the farmer had stared at him with a curious light in his eyes, but had said little.

THE next attack came the following night. Hartley had fled from his bedroom and slammed the door just in time to escape the thing that clawed and slobbered and bellowed at the thin panel. But before Hartley and the aroused Liggett could return with their guns it had taken fright and escaped through the shattered window.

Its tracks led into a patch of thick underbrush nearby, but to enter that tangled wilderness of shadow at night would have been sheer suicide. Liggett had spent half an hour at the telephone, arranging for the villagers to meet at his house at dawn to begin the pursuit. Then, since they could not sleep, the two men returned to Hartley's bedroom and talked until nearly dawn.

"It's marked you down," Liggett said. "It's after you, like I thought. I figgered—" He hesitated, scratching the stubble on his chin. "I figgered that maybe we could trap it—"

Hartley caught his meaning. "Using me for bait? No!"

"What else can we do? We've

tried to track it, but it hides in the North Swamp by day. It's the only way, unless you want it to kill more people. You can't keep kids indoors all the time, Hartley."

"The National Guard—" Hartley began, but Liggett interrupted him.

"How can they git it there in the swamp? If the thing could be got by ord'nary means we'd have done it. We'll track it, come dawn, but it won't do any good. Don't you see, man, every minute counts? Even while we're talking here the thing may be butcherin' somebody. Don't forgit—" He broke off, eyeing Hartley.

"I know. You think I started it. But—God! I've told myself over and over that the thing's a freak, some hellish outcome of an unnatural mating. But—" "

"But you know that's not so," Liggett said quietly. "You know what it is."

"No." Hartley shook his head dully. "It can't—"

HE stopped, staring at Liggett's face. The farmer was glaring past Hartley's shoulder, incredulous horror in his eyes. He cried out a startled warning, sent Hartley spinning with a sudden push. The artist had a glimpse of a shining hideous countenance protruding through the window; a dreadful mask that was neither batrachoid nor human, but partook monstrously of the attributes of both. A great slit-like mouth worked loosely, and yellow, glazed eyes glared into Hartley's; there was a choking stench of foul corruption, and the thing was in the room. Liggett's gun blasted.

The creature seemed to twist in midair, and the farmer went down beneath the onslaught. An agonized shriek welled out, broke off abruptly. The monster, crouching over Liggett's body, lifted a muzzle wet with fresh blood and made a gobbling sound, dreadfully reminiscent of a chuckle, deep in its throat. Sick and shaking, Hartley felt the door-knob beneath his fingers, and he flung the door open as the creature leaped.

He slammed it just in time, but a panel splintered under a terrific impact. Hartley fled along the hall as the door crashed.

Outside the house he hesitated momentarily, glancing around in an agony of indecision. In the cold grayness that precedes the dawn he saw the nearest house perhaps two hundred feet away, but as he started to race toward it the thing came bounding into view, intercepting him. It had apparently crept out through the window by which it had entered.

Hartley suddenly remembered his automatic and clawed it out, fired point-blank at the creature as it came at him. There was a croaking snarl of rage, and the loose slit-mouth worked hideously; a little stream of foul black ichor began to trickle slowly from a wound on the wattled, pouchy throat of the thing.

But it did not halt, and Hartley, realizing that a creature of such monstrous size must possess tremendous vitality, turned to flee. It was between him and the village, and as though realizing its advantage the thing kept at Hartley's heels, giving him no chance to double back. The thought flashed unbidden into Hartley's mind: the monster was herding him!

He heard a window creak up, heard a shout. Then he was running for his life back along the road over which he had fled on the first night of the horror.

At the thought, and at sight of a small lane—a rutted cart-path—joining the road at right angles, he twisted aside and raced along it. His only hope lay in somehow getting back to the village. Behind him came the gasping and slobbering, the rhythmic pounding that betokened the grim pursuit.

He chanced a snap shot over his shoulder, but the hazy light of the false dawn was deceptive, and he missed. He dared waste no more bullets.

The thing was herding him! Twice he saw paths that led back to the village, and each time the pursuing monster blocked his escape, circling with great leaps to his right until

the paths had been passed. And presently the fields grew wilder, and the vegetation took on a lush, unhealthy greenness. He might have attempted to scale a tree, but there was none near enough to the road, and the pursuer was too close. With a dreadful shock of realization Hartley saw that the North Swamp lay before him—the ill-omened morass about which all the ghastly legends had centered.

The ridge to the east was silhouetted against pale grayness. From far away Hartley heard a sound that sent a thrill of hope through him. The sound of an automobile motor—no, two of them! He remembered his neighbor's shout as he had fled from Liggett's house. The man must have gone for help, roused the village. But the snarling breathing was dreadfully close.

Once the monster paused, and Hartley glanced over his shoulder to see it clawing in hideous rage at its wounded throat. The bullet must have handicapped it in the pursuit, else Hartley would long before have fallen beneath ripping talons. He brought up his gun, but the thing, as though realizing his purpose, sprang forward, and Hartley had to sprint in order to escape the great leaps. The sound of motors grew louder in the dawn-stillness.

The path wound through the swamp. It was overgrown with weeds, rutted and pitted deeply, and at times the encroaching ooze had crept up until only a narrow ribbon of dry land was left. On all sides the lush greenness of the morass spread, with occasional open spaces of repellently black water. Over all lay a curious stillness, an utter lack of motion. No wind ruffled the tops of the grass-fronds, no ripples spread over the waters. The sounds of the pursuit, the roaring of the motors, seemed an incongruous invasion of this land of deathly stillness.

The end came suddenly, without warning. Green slime covered the road for a distance of a dozen yards; Hartley, splashing through the icy, ankle-deep water, felt his foot go down into a hole, and fell heavily.

wrenching his ankle. Even as he fell he rolled aside desperately felt a wind brush him as the monster's impetus carried it beyond him.

Hartley's arms, outthrust, were abruptly embedded in something soft and clinging, something that sucked and pulled them down inexorably. With a rasping cry he wrenched them free from the quicksand, fell back to the firmer ground of the road. He heard the sound of a shot, and, flat on his back in the ooze, saw a monstrous mask of horror incarnate looming above him. The sound of motors had increased to a roar, and a shout of encouragement came to his ears.

The monster hesitated, drew back, and Hartley, remembering his gun, jerked it from his belt. He fired point-blank at the creature, and coincidentally with the report of his own gun came a volley from the cars. Lead whined above him, and he felt a stinging pain in his shoulder.

SUDDENLY it seemed as though the monster were a huge bladder, punctured in a dozen places, pouring out black and nauseous ichor. With a hoarse gasping cry it flopped aside, made a crippled, one-sided leap, and came down in the bog beside the road. Then, swiftly, it began to sink.

The quicksand took it. Its huge hind-quarters, black and glistening, corded with muscle, disappeared almost immediately, and then the distended, leprously white belly. Hartley, sick and fainting, felt hands lifting him to his feet, heard questioning voices that seemed to come from a great distance.

But he had eyes only for the abysmal horror that was being engulfed a dozen yards from him, the webbed and spurred flail-like talons that were desperately beating the slime, the misshapen, hideous head that rolled from side to side in agony. From the gaping mouth of the thing came a ghastly outpouring of croaking shrieks, a monstrous belching that suddenly grew horribly familiar, articulate, thick and gut-

(Concluded on page 129)

Servant of Satan



Her hair was a writhing mass of hissing snakes

*The Snakes of Medusa Writhe and Hiss as the Devil's
Disciple Summons His Elemental Servants to
Their Diabolical Task!*

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

Author of "The Iron World," "Revenge of the Robot," etc.

TIME is said to be a great healer—a bringer of forgetfulness of pain, and tribulation, and horror. But I cannot think back to that fateful evening two years ago without a shudder of revulsion—without again feeling myself in the grip of the ancient and incredibly malignant creatures known as Elementals.

Those Elementals — blasphemous monstrosities which orthodox science will tell you do not and cannot exist — were known to the ancients, described in their writings, depicted in their paintings and sculptures. And those of them with which I came to such horrible grips in this, our twentieth century, were restored to their immemorial and terrible power by

the evil machinations of one modern man.

I felt and saw them then. I even smelled the charnel reptilian odor that emanated from their foul bodies as they materialized.

Aye, they are all around us in our daily lives. But they are unable to manifest themselves to us without human help—without living mediums from whom to suck the strength they require for their hideous and revolting materializations. God help—and God alone can help—the person who gives way to them; who lets them gain dominion over him.

I THOUGHT that I, Tom Carter, was the happiest man in the world that Friday afternoon, two years ago, when I locked my desk and prepared to say good-by to the gang at the office. For five years I had slaved in order to work my way up to the job of assistant general manager of the Brinkman Express Company. And I had slaved with a double purpose.

April Harris and I had fallen in love five years before when our desks adjoined in the Manhattan Business College—April, with her big violet eyes and honey-colored hair. And now at last we were to be married.

Half a dozen of the boys rode down the elevator with me, waved me off as I climbed into the cab and slammed the door. "Three Stuyvesant Place," I told the driver. "Down in the Village. Make it snappy and I'll go heavy on the tip."

He made a swift U-turn in the middle of the block that flung me back into the corner, then speeded south on Park Avenue. He knew his business and it wasn't long before we turned into the comparatively quiet Stuyvesant Place, where April's Greenwich Village apartment was located. My heart beat joyfully. Yet underneath, was there a premonition of evil? Maybe I'm reading back into it something that wasn't there—not at that moment anyway. I don't know.

And it meant nothing special to me, when, as we lurched around the corner, I saw a big shiny black

limousine pull away from the curb in front of us. It roared away, a big luxurious Isotta with drawn curtains, that must have cost a small fortune. Vehicles of that sort were rare in this neighborhood.

Yet how was I to dream that this particular one had any special significance for me? Did any mental shudder come to warn me, any spinal chill? Perhaps. But if it did, I mistook it for a thrill of happiness. My mind was too full of April, and of the joy I believed we were soon to have together.

My cab stopped with an abruptness that threw me forward and knocked my hat askew. I didn't mind. I gave the driver a five spot, told him to keep the change, flung the door open, dashed across the sidewalk and up the steps. I jabbed the bell button and waited.

There was no response. I could hear the bell ringing in April's second floor apartment. I thought perhaps April was having her bath and couldn't get to the buzzer just then. A delivery boy from the corner delicatessen came out, carrying an empty box. Evidently he had just made a delivery of groceries. I recognized him.

"Hello, Bob," I said.

"Hello, Mr. Carter," he answered—and his next words, usually spoken, were like the blow of a fist: "Looking for Miss Harris? I just saw her go out with a man."

"What!" I cried. "What man! Where!"

"Never saw him before," Bob answered. "Dressed like a million bucks, but all in black. Had a big car parked out in front, too, and a chauffeur in black livery."

"But his face, Bob?" I cried, worried and perplexed. "What did he look like?"

"Like the devil," he answered amazingly. "And I'm not cussing, Mr. Carter. It's just how he looked—like one of those pictures of Meph—Meph—"

"Mephistopheles," I broke in impatiently.

"Yeah, Mr. Carter. Black hair that came down to a point in front—"

eyebrows slanting upward—glittering black eyes. Sort of gave me the shivers when I saw him. I couldn't imagine where Miss Harris would be going with a guy like that."

I darted past him and bounded up the stairs. Perhaps he had been mistaken—had taken some other girl for April in the dimly lit hallway.

But the door of April's apartment stood wide open. I knew she never left it that way. I entered. The place was in disorder. Her new steamer trunk—a gift from me—was closed and locked. But her two bags stood open, only partly packed. I looked into the bath room. The shower curtain was wet and still dripping. The wet marks of April's small bare feet were on the bath mat. Her negligee hung over the chair.

APRIL had left! On the eve of our wedding!

I was like a man distraught, running hither and thither about the apartment, peering here, peering there. Suddenly I stopped. My frightened eyes had glimpsed a note lying in the middle of the coffee table, held down by a tiny ash tray. It was addressed to me. Reading it, my happy world crashed about me, my visions of joy splintered into tragic grief:

Dear Tom:

By the time you read this I will be gone to where you will never see me again—gone with the man I really love. Perhaps I should have remained to face you and have it out. But on second thought, I decided that this would be the easier and kinder way.

Good-by and good luck.

April.

I was stunned—uncomprehending. I fell back upon the studio couch. A pin stuck me, and I became dumbly aware that I was sitting on a newly pressed gown to which was attached a fresh corsage of orchids—the orchids I had sent to April. The pin that held them had pricked me. Savagely, I hurled it into a corner. I spread the crumpled note on the coffee table and read it once more—to convince myself I was not dreaming. Thank God I did so!

April and I had taken secretarial courses, had both learned shorthand. I hadn't used mine for nearly three years, but the rigid training I had received in the business college had done its work well.

Now I suddenly recognized, attached to the very first word, the shorthand character for the sound "p." What could it mean? I looked at the next word and there was the character which indicated the sound "s." P. S. A message within a message! I drew an envelope from my pocket—the envelope which contained our marriage license—and rapidly transcribed the symbols on the back.

When I was done, I had the following ominous message which had been blended in terse shorthand characters with the original note:

Pasquale forcing me write this. Taking me away don't know where. Torturing me. Horrible threats. Wire noose around my neck. Suffering and deathly afraid, but thinking only of you dear. Find me quickly. His license number 126-8347 A.

His license number! The only clue. The swift picture flashed through my mind—she, sitting at her writing desk by the window—a kidnaper, resembling the Devil, strangling her and dictating what she wrote—she, seeing the waiting car outside, noting down the license number!

And Pasquale! Pasquale could only be one man! Pasquale Sarasini! My most persistent rival during my schoolboy romance with April! The description of the delivery boy fitted him perfectly. He had taken a book-keeping course, hence had not learned shorthand. I had almost forgotten him in the intervening years—had even forgotten the malignant threats he had mouthed when he came upon April and me suddenly, one day, in the empty classroom after school, and saw us in each other's arms.

April had broken with him completely the day before. He had seemed to take it calmly, hiding his chagrin and disappointment. But that afternoon, seeing the proof that

she loved another, he had said through hate-whitened lips:

"I'll see that you suffer the tortures of the damned for this, April."

I had not seen Pasquale after that, nor had April, for nearly four years. But then we heard rumors. He was delving into the occult, mystifying scientists. His picture began to appear in American and British papers. His fame spread to continental Europe. At first he acted as a materialization medium, giving private seances. Later he went on the stage, producing illusions.

THEY were not illusions—I know that now.

He became famous, rich, sought after. He was billed as "Sarasini the Great." He got motion picture contracts at fabulous prices. Wealthy people patronized his private seances. They came away with amazing tales, not only of their loved ones materialized before their eyes, but of strange monsters and creatures like those depicted in ancient tombs and writings.

There was the cat-headed Bast of the ancient Egyptians, which talked to them in a mewling voice. There was the ibis-headed Thoth, scribe of the gods—hawk-headed Horus, son of Isis and Osiris. There was the Lamia of Greek legend, a serpent that became a woman and once more turned into a serpent before the eyes of its auditors, a seven-headed hydra, a Gorgon with snaky locks.

During the seances, Sarasini played an instrument of his own invention—a sort of combination piano and organ. The music was weird and uncanny, of his own composition, and he stated that it was necessary to the materialization of his creatures, which he claimed really existed in another plane. Also, there were two tall poles, surmounted by rectangular caps. It was said that these were somehow connected with the instrument, and that materializations took place only between these poles, as if some electrical force were involved, the force traveling between them as a static spark leaps the gap between the knob of a Leyden jar

and a conductor brought within range.

Sarasini made enemies in his profession. One spiritualistic medium and profound student of the occult, accused him publicly of being in league with Satan. And Sarasini had coolly admitted it!

In another generation he would have been burned at the stake; the horrors that he perpetrated would have been blotted out forever. But in this so-called "enlightened" generation, when all such things are scoffed at, it only created a sensation in the press—and was duly tagged by astute columnists as a publicity stunt. My God! How far it was from a mere publicity stunt I have reason to know!

Then, at the height of his career Sarasini retired from public life, disappeared from the sight and ken of men. A year passed.

And now—and now he had suddenly to claim the vengeance he had sworn more than five years before!

All this flashed through my mind as I frantically dialed the police. Swiftly, I requested the desk sergeant to give me the name and address attached to the license number April had written down. I told him who I was—the manager of the Brinkman Express Company. We often gave employment to ex-police-men. The sergeant snapped that he would get me the information.

I didn't tell him what had happened because I felt that this was a matter requiring discreet attention rather than the brusque tactics of the police. I think I was frightened at the thought of April disappearing completely, mysteriously, should the law intervene. It seemed an age before the phone rang.

The sergeant called back a moment later—it seemed ages to me. On the back of the envelope containing our marriage license I jotted down the name he gave me—Pablo Simister. Pasquale Sarasini hadn't changed his initials, at any rate, even if he had changed his name. The address was the penthouse at an uptown number on Riverside Drive near Washington Park.

Jamming my hat down on my head, I dashed downstairs and sprinted to the nearest subway kiosk, choosing that mode of transportation as the quickest. Two minutes later I was hurtling northward on the express. It reached One Hundred and Eighty-first Street Station at last.

I got off, dashed through the turnstile and up the steps, then over to Riverside Drive. I reached the apartment building, entered the foyer.

THERE were four self-service elevators. The lights showed two were in service. I entered one of the others, closed the door, pressed the top button. A few moments later the cage stopped, the door opened automatically. I stepped out. A stairway led upward at my left.

I climbed it, stood on the landing, and manipulated the brass knocker. I noticed that it was shaped like the head of a Medusa, with snaky locks. The door, I observed, was of steel, but painted and paneled to resemble wood.

I heard no sound on the other side. I knocked again. Before I could release the Medusa-headed knocker, the door swung silently open. Behind it stood a man in black butler's livery—black trimmed with silver. His face was completely concealed by a black mask—a domino with a sort of veil that hung down beneath it. His head was covered by a black hood. Startled though I was, I stepped forward so as to be able to block the door with my foot and knee, and said with simulated jocularity:

"Ah! A masquerade, I see. Is Mr. Simister in? I'm an old schoolmate of his—from out of town. Thought I'd drop in and say 'hello'."

"I'm sorry, sir; Mr. Simister is not at home," he replied politely.

"If you're expecting him soon I might step in and wait."

"I'm afraid I couldn't permit that, sir," he replied. "You see the master is exceedingly busy today, and I have orders to admit no one. Perhaps tomorrow—"

He started to close the door, but I blocked it with my foot. I did

more; I uncorked a left for the spot beneath that black veil where I judged the point of his jaw would be. As ill luck would have it his jaw was shorter than I thought. My knuckles only grazed it. Then, before I could recover my balance, I felt my wrist caught in a grip of steel.

"I wouldn't do that, sir," he said, calmly. "You might hurt yourself."

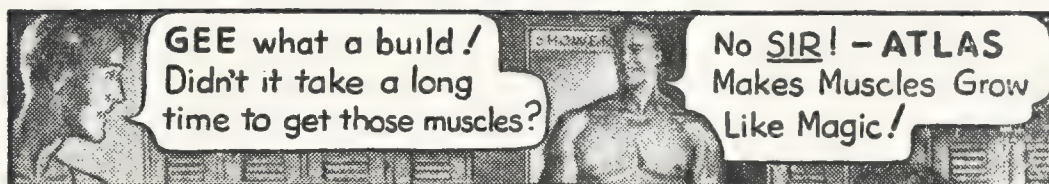
Desperately I jerked my wrist toward me, and as the butler was gripping it tightly, he came with it. His other hand was still on the door-knob. Before he could get it up I gave him a right uppercut. His head snapped back, and he let go of my wrist. I drove a left and right to his solar plexus, doubled him up, then a left hook to the jaw that spun him around and broke his hold on the door. He fell on his face.

Softly I closed the door, then bent over him cautiously. He might be shamming. I stripped the hood and mask from his head. He appeared to be a Latin. He was out cold—the eyes turned upward and inward.

I looked around quickly. I was in a long hallway draped to the ceiling with black velvet hangings, like a sound-proofed radio room. Not a door was visible except the one through which I had just come. And that, I saw, could be rendered invisible, also, by two drapes now drawn up on either side and caught with silver cords.

There were places where the hangings overlapped. I went to the first of these, drawing it back, saw a door, which opened inward. It was a cloak room. Swiftly, I dragged the unconscious butler inside, and as swiftly divested him of his livery. Then I removed my own clothing and put on his. I bound him with the stout silver cords which hung on either side of the doorway, and which could be used, when required, for holding back the drapes. Then I gagged and locked him in.

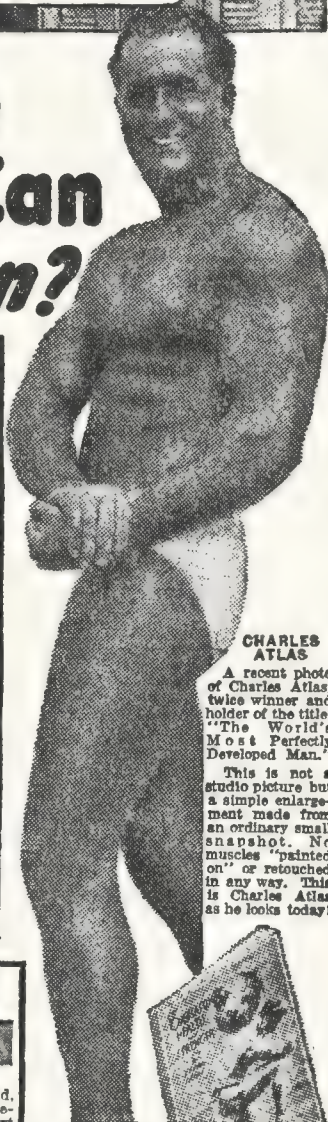
I found no other doors until I reached the end of the hallway. Here, double doors opened into a spacious, modernistically furnished living room. The walls, like those
(Continued on page 118)



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Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

City..... State.....

(Continued from page 116)
of the hallway, were completely concealed by black velvet hangings.

I was about to go back and take my post before the door, when the drapes at the opposite side of the room suddenly parted, and a man stepped through.

I recognized him, instantly. He was in evening clothes, and had not changed greatly since I had last seen him. There was still that diabolical expression, those upturned brows and glittering black eyes.

"Did you get rid of our caller, Dominick?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I replied, mimicking the voice of the butler, while my heart pounded. "He's gone, sir."

He raised a quizzical eyebrow. "Mix my cocktail," he ordered.

I had previously noted the liquor cabinet standing against the drapes at my left—an ornate thing of ebony and silver. I recalled that his favorite cocktail during our school days had been a Martini, with an extra dash of orange bitters, but without the olive. Strange to say, he, a Latin, detested olives, and could not even stand food cooked in olive oil. I mixed the drink.

I thought I was getting away with it, but—

"Get 'em up, Carter," his voice said behind me, and I felt something hard prodding my back.

"Clever," he drawled. "Damn' clever. You almost got away with it. But it so happens that since last year, I've been allergic to gin. Get your hands together over your head."

Perforce I obeyed, and he snapped on a pair of handcuffs. Then he stripped off the hood and mask and ordered me to turn around.

"You haven't changed much, Carter," he said. "Still built like a battleship, with a mug like the Great Stone Face. I don't see how the devil you traced me here so quickly. But it doesn't matter, now. All that matters is that you're here. Sit down."

I seated myself in a black-upholstered chair. He sat down on the davenport, and slipped the auto-

matic back into his shoulder holster. "You've come for April, of course," he said.

"Clever of you to guess it," I answered him.

"What have you done with Dominick? Did you kill him?"

"Knocked him cold and tied him up."

"So? Well, he can stay that way for awhile. Perhaps it will teach him not to be so careless again. I suppose you realize that you're in a tight spot—that I can kill you and get away with it. No one will ever trace you here."

"That's where you're wrong," I lied as calmly as I could. "The police not only know I'm here. They actually gave me your address. If you'll release April at once—"

"Just a moment, Carter. Not so fast." He raised a slim white hand. "April has gone to a place where even I can't bring her back—permanently. I can only bring her temporarily—from the different plane in which she now resides."

I HALF rose from my chair, straining at my shackles, longing to reach his throat. "You mean you've killed her?"

He jerked the automatic from the holster. "Back into your seat, Carter. That's better." He laid the gun on the table top.

"No, I haven't killed her. I have transformed her. She is in a different and superior plane of existence. I have powers of which you do not dream, Carter. People have accused me of being in league with the devil. It is true.

"Aye. Satan is my master. He has made me what I am. I was baptized—but not by a priest of the church. When the time came for my baptism, both of my parents were ill—a flu epidemic. My nurse, an Arab girl, was a Yezidi—a secret worshiper of Satan. They call him Malik Taus in their language, because they fear to pronounce his real name—Shaitan.

"She took me to her own priest—deceived my parents—and I was baptized into the cult of the Yezidis. Later, I sat at the feet of their

priest—Shaykh Ibrahim—drank in his teachings, absorbed his knowledge, mastered the esoteric truths that the worshipers themselves do not know, truth that is reserved for adepts alone.

"When I had learned all that the Shaykh could teach me, I went on by myself. Delved into the ancient writings of all peoples—athirst for greater knowledge. After many trials and failures, I learned how to summon the Master himself. He came, and made a pact with me—dictating the terms, to which I acceded. My soul in exchange for a temporal power such as no man has ever before enjoyed. He summoned seven of his creatures to be my servants—to work my will.

"Enough of that. *April is here in this room—now—but you cannot see her.* Perhaps you can see her a little if she makes a supreme effort."

HE turned his glittering eyes to a point beside my chair.

"April, show yourself," he commanded.

Suddenly my left side felt cold—as if all of the heat had been drawn out of it. There was a cold breeze blowing against my face, as from an underground burial vault suddenly opened up. And there came to my nostrils a dank, musty, reptilian odor—incredibly foul.

Horror of horrors! A tiny whirlpool of gray mist began forming on the floor before my eyes. It enlarged until it was five feet tall. Streamers of mist, like arms, extended from it. Two black orifices formed in the top, not solid, but like the hollow eye-sockets of a skull.

"The great Sarisini," I mocked, even though mystic fingers of fear clutched my heart, "pulling his magic tricks! Do you mean to tell me that this apparition is April? Come again."

No, I did not believe my words. I knew there was some alien and unutterably evil presence in the room. Not April. No, not April. I could not conceive of April becoming such a creature. But it was

(Continued on page 120)

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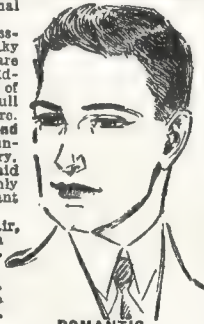
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(Continued from page 119)

something alive, and sinister, and incredibly loathsome.

As I spoke, the apparition suddenly disappeared. The cold breeze stopped. Once more my left side was at normal temperature. But the nauseous odor was still in my nostrils—I could still feel the invisible presence of the thing from which it had emanated.

"So you mock me—scoff at my powers," Sarisini cried. "Wait. I can't bring her back completely here, but I can with the proper equipment. You wait here. I'll show you April—let you talk with her—for only a short time. Don't try any more tricks. You are absolutely helpless—in my power."

He rose and returned the automatic to its holster. Then he said: "Watch him, my beauties," and turning on his heel, parted the black drapes and disappeared.

His last order was apparently addressed to empty air. But the air was not empty! I could feel sinister presences around me, pressing against me, watching me with hollow, cavernous eyes.

I tried to tell myself that I was the victim of a delusion. Reason came to my aid. Sarasini had forgotten one thing—my profession. Every employee and executive of the Brinkman Express Company had a pistol permit, and carried a gun when on duty. I'd forgotten to take mine off when I left the office. It was still in my hip pocket, supported by a leather holster attached to my belt, and not noticeable under the butler's coat. I moved my manacled hands around, and found that I could easily reach it with my right hand.

I wasn't yet ready to draw, however. Instead, I stood up. Then it happened. I was about to walk silently toward the opening through which the magician had disappeared, when a misty spiral shape suddenly materialized on each side of me. Again I felt the cold. In an instant, my muscles grew numb—all the strength and heat oozed out of them as though sucked. I slumped stiffly back into the chair. Instantly, the

two wraiths dissolved and disappeared. Once more I grew warm, got back the use of my muscles.

I remembered Sarasini's seemingly directionless command just before he had left the room— "Watch him, my beauties." These, then, were his "beauties"—these horrid wraiths, these shapes of writhing mist, that had sucked the strength from me and then given it back, that had frozen my blood and then allowed it to grow warm again. Like the Gorgons of Greek mythology, which had supposedly had the power to turn men to stone, so these shapes had given me the promise and the threat of the same power!

Could it be? Could it be that the terrible sisters, Stheno, Euryale and Medusa had actually existed? Could it be that I was now held prisoner by similar beings?

The black drapes in front of me parted once more. Sarasini appeared. Gone were his immaculate evening clothes. In their place he wore the tight-fitting scarlet costume of Mephistopheles. The costume suited his diabolical features far better than dinner clothes.

"Release him now, my pets," he said, again apparently speaking to empty air. Then he addressed me. "Come ahead, Carter."

He held back the drape while I walked through into the next room, my hands manacled before me.

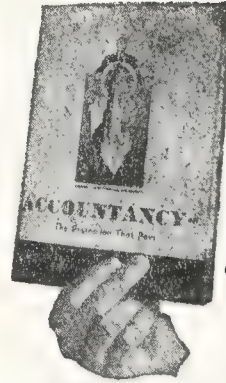
I had seen pictures of the apparatus he used on the stage, and it was now duplicated in this room, which was a small auditorium with about two dozen chairs that faced the stage.

"Take a seat in the front row, Carter," he ordered.

I did so, and he walked to the keyboard of the strange instrument he had used so often in his public performances.

"Before I begin," he said, "I'll make a deal with you. You are completely in my power, yet I have no particular reason for killing you—yet. You hate me, but so do many others I have spared. You have never wronged me. April did that.

(Continued on page 122)



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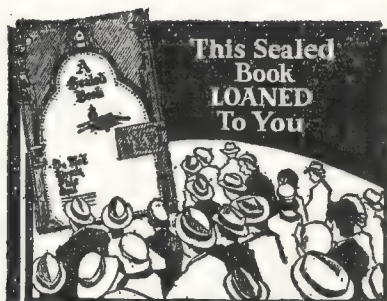
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(Continued from page 121)

She is the one I hate, and she is paying the penalty. If I convince you that April has passed to another plane where neither you nor any other human being can reach her, will you agree to go away peacefully, and say nothing to anyone about what you have seen?"

"I'll make no compact with you," I answered.

"I'll convince you anyhow," he said coldly. "Then, perhaps, you'll change your mind. If you don't—it will be just too bad for you."

His hands pressed the keys. A peculiar wailing sound arose. It could not be called music. Not harmony, not melody, but a hideous cacophony of sound that grated on my ears, caused icy shivers to run up and down my spine, and set my teeth on edge.

It grew louder, rising and falling in waves of horrific discord. At the same time I suddenly became aware of another sound—a noise like the crackling of an electric spark between the two upright posts with their strange, rectangular caps.

Once again I saw a misty spiral forming. But this time it swiftly took human form. A halo of light gradually grew brighter about the head as it gained solidity. Within this halo I saw the formation of writhing tentacles.

The human figure became a lovely girl, scantily clad, holding a sword in her hand.

I cried out. She had the form and features of April! But her hair! Good God, her hair! A writhing mass of hissing snakes, that snapped and fought among themselves, coiling and uncoiling and darting their forked tongues from their scaly mouths!

The wailing chorus died down to a soft undertone.

The materialized, Gorgon-headed creature spoke. The voice was the voice of April!

"Go back, Tom," it said. "Go back and forget. You were foolish to follow me here. You should have heeded my letter. I am now an entirely different entity, living in a

different plane. The old April whom you knew is gone—gone forever—gone beyond your reach.”

The head shook, and the serpents that were the hair of it, increased their hissing and writhing.

“Would you want to take me in your arms, now, with these?” the voice asked, and her free hand pointed to the reptilian crown.

“April! April!” I cried. “I’d take you in my arms in spite of hell!”

“Sit down, you fool,” said Sarasini. “Her touch, now, would mean instant death to you—a horrible, agonizing death. She is beyond your reach—forever. Show him, April—show him that you are no longer human—that you have powers that are super-human.”

Thrice the girl whirled the sword in a shimmering arc above her head. Then, with the fourth swing she brought it lower in a back-handed motion. The keen blade passed beneath her chin, severing her head from her body! With her other hand she caught the toppling head and held it aloft!

The snakes continued to writhe and hiss in the aura of light surrounding the severed head. There was no blood on the sword blade, or the cut edges of the neck. The closed eyes opened. The lips spoke.

“You see, Tom? Could any human being do this and live? Are you satisfied?”

My words, my heart, strangled in my throat. “Your message—” I choked.

“I meant it—every word,” replied that incredible head. “I mean it now when I say: Leave me. Forget that I ever existed.”

Then I was to learn that love could be stronger than death, than horror. My love for the April that was, fought with my horror at the April I saw. I wanted her, the old April. This horrible materialization of some hell-spawned creature that was not the girl I loved, was, and forever would be, beyond my ken. But the old April seemed to send a call into my heart—the April who had written me that secret appeal of

(Continued on page 124)

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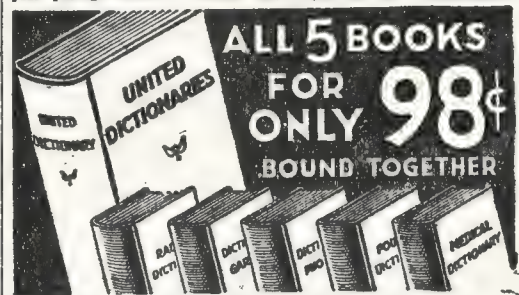
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(Continued from page 123)

which this creature was unaware. I whipped my gun from my pocket at last, and stood up, aiming it at Sarasini's heart.

"Stick 'em up, or by God I'll drill you," I cried.

He raised his hands from the keys of the instrument as I advanced to a place beside the apparition. The wailing ceased. Then—horror of horrors—the thing beside me hurled its severed head, with its mass of squirming, hissing snakes, full in my face. I lurched back, flinging the revolting thing from me. It had a slimy reptilian feel and smell.

As it struck the floor, the sword in the hand of the headless figure swept down, striking the gun from my hand. Sarasini whipped his automatic from his shoulder holster and fired, just as I stooped to retrieve my gun. His bullet passed over my back. Before he could fire again I shot without aiming—merely elevating the muzzle of the gun with the butt resting on the floor.

I shot to kill, but miscalculated. The bullet caught him in the groin. He doubled up with a shriek of anguish, and fell on his face—the automatic clattering from his hand.

I retrieved it. As I stood erect I saw the Gorgon apparition dissolving—turning back into a mist. The head was going through the same process. Its writhing, snaky locks became tentacles of gray mist. Then these too were withdrawn into a cloud, which moved toward the platform and joined the larger cloud that had been the body. Quickly, the whole dissolved to nothingness.

Sarasini was groaning weakly on the floor, his knees drawn up nearly to his chin, his blood staining the crimson suit a darker red as it welled from the bullet wound.

"At him, my pets," he moaned. "Freeze him. Suck the life from him."

Funnels of mist swirled all about me. There were six of them, clutching at me with their wraithlike tentacles, glaring at me with their hollow eyes. I felt as if I had suddenly been deprived of all bodily

heat and strength. Frantically I fought them—fought them with every nerve and muscle in my body.

Gradually, the wraiths dissolved. The warmth returned to my body. Suddenly I knew! By wounding their master I had weakened their power!

Sarasini was groaning and cursing. There was froth on his lips. The fire was dying into embers in his eyes. Suddenly they widened with fear. And as suddenly, I saw why. Six funnel-shaped wraiths descended upon him—the apex of each touched his body.

"Back, my beauties," he groaned. "Away from me, my pets. You are attacking *me*—your friend and master."

But the things fastened themselves to his body like anemones growing on a submarine stone. His groans and struggles lessened. He shuddered, stiffened, lay still—his eyes began to glaze. But still the wraiths clung to him, each a good six feet tall, and all undulating lightly in the air as undersea plants move in the water.

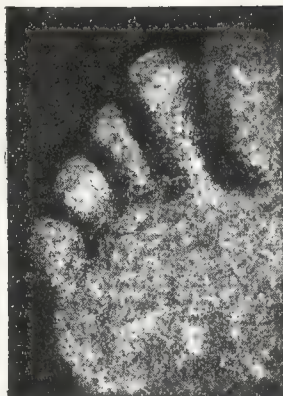
Sarasini was on the point of death—I could see that. The life force was being sucked from him by these creatures of his that had turned on their master. But suddenly he rallied, mustered his strength. And it was now that he turned to *his* Master for succor.

"Shaitan! Satanas! Beelzebub! Great Lord of Darkness! Emperor of Evil! They have turned on me! I die! Save me, Master!"

I heard at that instant the most hideous sound that has ever fallen on human ears. I could not tell whence it came—it seemed to echo from all points of the compass, to come from everywhere and yet from nowhere in the room—it seemed to my ears to fill the whole world, inhuman, gloating cacodemoniacal cackinnations that resembled a cosmic mirthless laughter.

At that sound hope faded from the glazing eyes of Sarasini. Yet it flickered faintly once more, as he turned his head desperately to me.

(Continued on page 126)



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According to the Government Health Bulletin No. 9-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

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Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get rid of this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

Most people who have Athlete's Foot have tried all kinds of remedies to cure it without success. Ordinary germicides, antiseptics, salve or ointments seldom do any good.

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The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to kill the germ, so you can see why the ordinary remedies are unsuccessful.

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(Continued from page 125)

"Carter! Help me! Drive them off! If you do, I'll help you to rescue April! I swear it, Carter! My Master has deserted me! He is greedy to claim my soul—the forfeit I promised him—"

I reacted automatically to that cry for help. I emptied my gun into the tenebrous obscenities that were leeching his life away.

"Not that, Carter!" he cried. "Bullets cannot harm them! They are immune to mortal weapons! You saw what one did with the sword. They fear only goodness, and the symbols of goodness—the sacred symbols of the religions that worship God, the fountainhead of all good. The great seal of Solomon Baalshem, Lord of the Name; the six-pointed star inscribed with the Shem Hamphorash, Ineffable Name; the Cross—the crucifix! It is the simplest. Make a crucifix—quickly—of anything!"

I took the pencil from my pocket, broke it into two unequal pieces, lashed it in the form of a crucifix with a strip torn from my handkerchief.

"Touch my forehead with the point of the cross," Sarasini gasped. "Say: '*Anathema maranatha*'."

I did as he bade me. The six undulating things that clung to him disappeared before my eyes.

I mopped Sarasini's face with my torn handkerchief.

"Brandy, Carter," he panted. "I need strength—to carry out my promise to you—before I redeem my pledge to Satan."

I ran into the other room, brought back the brandy bottle and glass. Then I poured a stiff three fingers and supported his head while he drank it.

He sighed, and the color came back to his face, the glaze receded from his eyes.

"April is in the next room," he said, "in a coma—possessed by one of my seven Elementals. That's why there were only six in here. Take the cross and the brandy—you'll need both—and do with her as you did with me. Here, take my keys. First, let me unlock your handcuffs."

As the handcuffs fell from my wrists, he selected the key to the door, and pressed it into my hand.

God be thanked, I found April, half reclining on a chaise longue in a luxuriously furnished bedroom. She was in what I at first took to be a drugged sleep. But her eyes were staring beneath her half closed lids.

Lightly I tapped her on the forehead with the crucifix and repeated the words: "*Anathema maranatha*."

A gray, funnel-shaped wisp started up from the place I had touched. With incredible rapidity it grew, elongated. Then it detached itself, and, whirling away like a miniature waterspout, disappeared beyond the black curtains in the doorway.

And dear April opened her eyes, smiled up at me under the fringe of her long lashes. She held up her arms, and as I bent over her they

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

went around my neck. Our lips met—and clung.

Presently, I asked: "Can you walk, dear, or shall I carry you?"

"I can walk—in a minute or so," she replied.

I poured her a sip of brandy. Strengthened, she went with me into the next room.

Sarasini was propped up on one elbow. He asked for another drink of brandy and I poured it for him. He took it at a gulp.

"My minutes are numbered," he said in a low, sad voice. "When my life has ebbed away my Master will claim the soul which I have sold to him. You wronged me once, April, and I have hated you for it—hated you through the years. But you have suffered and paid—and the debt is wiped out.

"As death approaches, a new understanding comes to me. I have a new, and greater hate. My Elementals, which derived their strength from me and from the machine which I created for them under the direction of my Master, turned against me.

"I suspected that some day they might do so. I controlled them, yet I could feel that they were watching and waiting for the chance to turn on me. I was like an animal trainer in a cage of wild beasts, not knowing when or how I would be attacked."

He paused, asked for a cigarette. I lighted one for him.

"They brought me power and wealth," he went on, "and now they have brought me death. I could have survived your bullet, had it not been for their attack on me. I hate them. With your help, I'll break their power forever—the power I gave them.

"I have the knowledge—you the strength. Look in the room behind the instrument board—then do as I bid you. There you will find seven girls, connected with the instrument. I abducted them, one by one, hypnotized them, and turned them into mediums.

"Their bodies are the dwellings of
(Continued on page 128)

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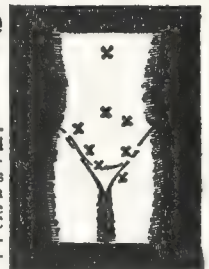
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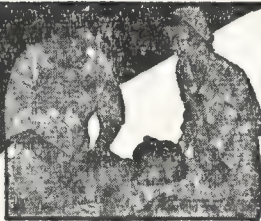


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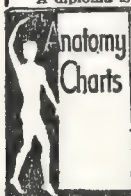
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(Continued from page 127)

my Elementals—their earthly homes. And they are not only the source of their power, but supply the mediumistic force which—amplified by my machine—make it possible for one Elemental at a time to materialize solidly between its poles, in almost any desired form. One of their favorite forms is one of the Gorgon, as you have seen.

"My time is short and I am going fast. Release those girls from the possession of the Elementals as you released April. They have suffered, and are suffering. I had intended to put April in the place of one who will soon die. But, through the power and mercy of the symbol in your hand, they will forget, even as she has forgotten, the agonies they now suffer. Disconnect them from the machine. Do this quickly. Then return to me."

April and I went into the room behind the fiendish instrument that was the product of Sarasini's perverted and devil-directed brain. There we saw seven pedestals, and on each a beautiful young girl, covered only with a scarlet, diaphanous drape. A leather band passed around the head of each, clamping an electrode to each temple. These electrodes were connected by wires to the instrument on which Sarasini had played his ugly discords.

"Give me the crucifix," said April.

I handed it to her, and while she touched, one by one, the possessed girls, I removed the electrodes from their heads.

Leaving April to care for them, I returned to the instrument room. Sarasini was now lying on his back, breathing stertorously. The death rattle was in his throat.

"Smash it," he whispered hoarsely. "Destroy the machine! Break it to bits!"

I picked up the stool and smashed that hell-spawned instrument until it was unrecognizable. I ripped all of the wires loose, and broke the connection between the smashed instrument and the two poles.

There isn't much more to tell.

I was not accused of murder be-

cause the evidence showed I had come to rescue April, and had been attacked. Dominick got a prison term for kidnaping, as an accessory. And we were forced to postpone our honeymoon until after his trial.

Then we decided not to go to Europe as we had originally intended. Instead, we took a cottage in Maine. Great stuff, that Maine air. Now there are two Aprils in my home. I'm back on the job, working like a beaver to save enough for the college education of April the Second.

But I have not forgotten the writhing shapes, the charnel reptilian smells. I shall carry the memory of them to my grave.

THE FROG

(Concluded from page 111)

tural; a frenzied outcry of blasphemy such as might come from the rotting tongue of a long-dead corpse.

All the men fell back, white with loathing; and Hartley dropped to his knees, retching and moaning in an agony of horror, as the *thing*, its mouth half choked with the hungry quicksand, bellowed:

"Awrrgh—ugh—ye—blast ye! Blast ye all! May the curse o' Persis Winthorp rot yer flesh an' send ye down to—"

The frightful outburst of sound gave place to a terrible gargling shriek that was abruptly choked off. There was a brief commotion in the ooze; a great bubble formed and burst . . . and age-old stillness brooded once more over the North Swamp.

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30x4-20	21	2.51	32x4 1/2	2.99	32x4 1/2	3.09	34x4 1/2	3.65
30x4-20	21	2.69	32x4 1/2	3.17	32x4 1/2	3.27	34x4 1/2	3.85
32x4-20	21	2.87	34x4 1/2	3.35	34x4 1/2	3.45	36x4 1/2	3.95
32x4-20	21	3.05	36x4 1/2	3.53	36x4 1/2	3.63	38x4 1/2	4.05
34x4-20	21	3.23	38x4 1/2	3.71	38x4 1/2	3.81	40x4 1/2	4.15
34x4-20	21	3.41	40x4 1/2	3.89	40x4 1/2	3.99	42x4 1/2	4.25
36x4-20	21	3.59	42x4 1/2	3.97	42x4 1/2	4.07	44x4 1/2	4.35
36x4-20	21	3.77	44x4 1/2	4.05	44x4 1/2	4.15	46x4 1/2	4.45
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60x4-20	21	7.91	90x4 1/2	5.89	90x4 1/2	5.99	92x4 1/2	6.75
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32x5-15	15	2.97	38x5-15	3.07	38x5-15	3.17	40x5-15	3.27
32x5-15	15	3.15	40x5-15	3.15	40x5-15	3.25	42x5-15	3.35
34x5-15	15	3.33	42x5-15	3.33	42x5-15	3.43	44x5-15	3.53
34x5-15	15	3.51	44x5-15	3.51	44x5-15	3.61	46x5-15	3.71
36x5-15	15	3.69	46x5-15	3.69	46x5-15	3.79	48x5-15	3.89
36x5-15	15	3.87	48x5-15	3.87	48x5-15	3.97	50x5-15	4.07
38x5-15	15	4.05	50x5-15	4.05	50x5-15	4.15	52x5-15	4.25
38x5-15	15	4.23	52x5-15	4.23	52x5-15	4.33	54x5-15	4.43
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40x5-15	15	4.59	56x5-15	4.59	56x5-15	4.69	58x5-15	4.79
42x5-15	15	4.77	58x5-15	4.77	58x5-15	4.87	60x5-15	4.97
42x5-15	15	4.95	60x5-15	4.95	60x5-15	5.05	62x5-15	5.15
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46x5-15	15	5.49	66x5-15	5.49	66x5-15	5.59	68x5-15	5.69
46x5-15	15	5.67	68x5-15	5.67	68x5-15	5.77	70x5-15	5.87
48x5-15	15	5.85	70x5-15	5.85	70x5-15	5.95	72x5-15	6.05
48x5-15	15	6.03	72x5-15	6.03	72x5-15	6.13	74x5-15	6.23
50x5-15	15	6.21	74x5-15	6.21	74x5-15	6.31	76x5-15	6.41
50x5-15	15	6.39	76x5-15	6.39	76x5-15	6.49	78x5-15	6.59
52x5-15	15	6.57	78x5-15	6.57	78x5-15	6.67	80x5-15	6.77
52x5-15	15	6.75	80x5-15	6.75	80x5-15	6.85	82x5-15	6.95
54x5-15	15	6.93	82x5-15	6.93	82x5-15	7.03	84x5-15	7.13
54x5-15	15	7.11	84x5-15	7.11	84x5-15	7.21	86x5-15	7.31
56x5-15	15	7.29	86x5-15	7.29	86x5-15	7.39	88x5-15	7.49
56x5-15	15	7.47	88x5-15	7.47	88x5-15	7.57	90x5-15	7.67
58x5-15	15	7.65	90x5-15	7.65	90x5-15	7.75	92x5-15	7.85
58x5-15	15	7.83	92x5-15	7.83	92x5-15	7.93	94x5-15	8.03
60x5-15	15	8.01	94x5-15	8.01	94x5-15	8.11	96x5-15	8.21
60x5-15	15	8.19	96x5-15	8.19	96x5-15	8.29	98x5-15	8.39
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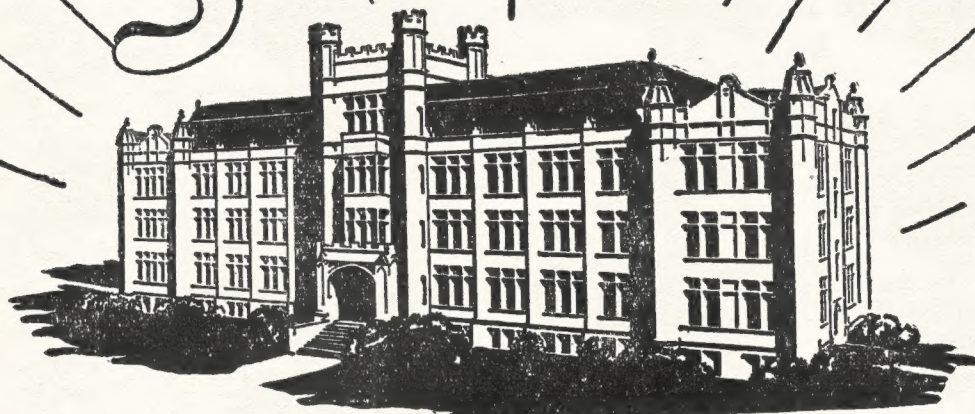
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Boys, Make Money and Earn from our Big Prize Book

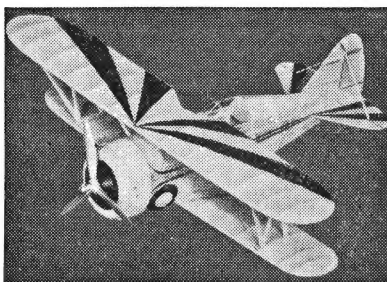
ANYTHING YOU WANT



WOW! Three hundred prizes for boys. Earn anything you want—including the de luxe streamlined Silver King aluminum bike shown at the left. Comes to you fully equipped with blast hornlite, coaster brake, platform carrier, rear-wheel stand, balloon tires. Has lock built in the steering fork. Sturdy bow-arch double-bar frame, built low.

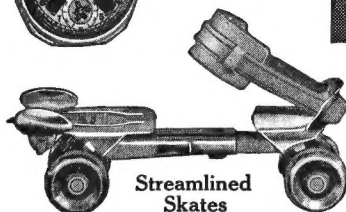
Earn this bike, a coaster wagon, typewriter, movie machine or anything else you want. Make MONEY, too. It's easy! It's fun! Just deliver The American Magazine, Woman's Home Companion and Collier's to customers whom you obtain in your neighborhood. Do it in spare time. Many boys earn a prize the first day. So can you. Mail coupon *today* to start. State age.

Pilot your own model plane. The Grumann Gulphawk shown at the right is a daisy. Look at that 3-bladed prop; notice the markings on the fuselage and the retractable landing gear. Earn it! Mail the coupon to start.



Popeye Watch

One of the swellest watches you've ever seen. It can be YOURS!

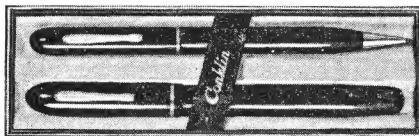


Streamlined Skates

When you begin rolling on these streamlined Globe skates you'll think you're on a bolt of greased lightning. You can earn them, any of 300 other big prizes, and make MONEY, too. Mail the coupon to start. Be the first boy in your neighborhood to get going.

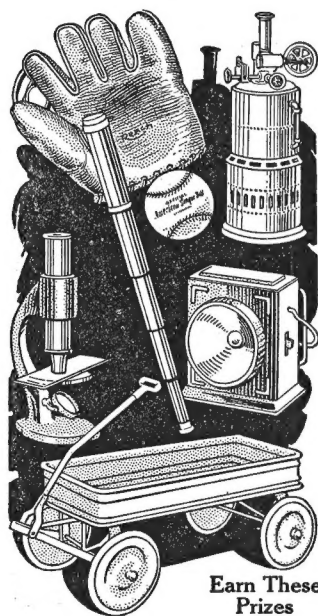
Look at that 200-power microscope shown at the right! And a telescope, steam engine, wagon and a "Joe DiMaggio" baseball glove! Earn anything you want—or the whole lot! Make money at the same time. If you're not a boy between 12 and 15, show this offer to someone who is. Do it *now!*

Mail the Coupon to Start

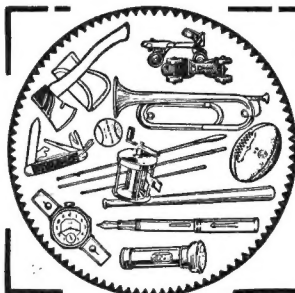


Think of the fun you'll have—with all the prizes you want and your pockets full of spending money. It's easy for the ambitious boy. Some fellows earn a prize the first day. Get in the fun NOW and earn money and prizes for months to come. Mail the coupon to start. Be sure to give your age.

300 Big Prizes to Choose From!



Earn These Prizes



Mr. Jim Thayer, Dept. 838
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Dear Jim: I want to make MONEY and earn a flock of PRIZES. Start me at once and rush me one of your beautiful 32-page Prize Books.

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YOUR PILES may be

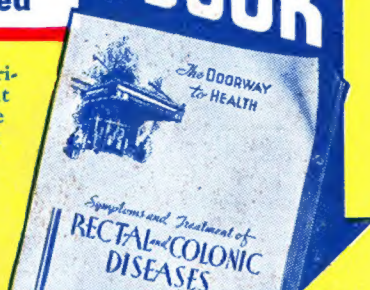
associated with any of these ailments

Piles and rectal disorders are rather common ailments among many men and women over 40—as well as younger people. There is medical authority to the effect that these disorders do not tend to correct themselves, and that self-applied medicines generally afford temporary relief only. ASK yourself then frankly if it is wise to needlessly expose yourself to the ever-present danger that some incurable condition of a malignant nature may develop. For this annoyance, pain, embarrassment and danger is generally needless, because rectal troubles can usually be corrected with little loss of time and without staying in hospital, or without ether, chloroform or radical surgery.

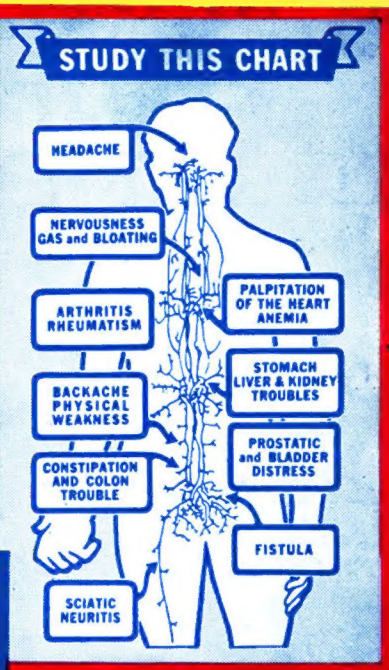
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This Book has helped Thousands
of Rectal Sufferers
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IF YOU suffer from any of the above ailments, do not neglect your rectal trouble. The ailments shown on this chart may be associated with piles or other rectal diseases. Even though your piles or rectal troubles may be in a minor stage—they may be a cause of conditions that are undermining your health. You will find many facts of great interest explained and many questions you will want to ask—answered in the free book. **SEND** for your **FREE** copy today.

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☐ Other Rectal Trouble

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